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# THE BEGINNINGS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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CHARLTON M. LEWIS

EMILY SANFORD PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN YALE UNIVERSITY

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# PREFACE

THE only satisfactory way to teach English literature to beginners is to put the literature itself in their hands, and try to aid them in getting an intelligent appreciation of it. The study of literary evolutions is important even at first, but only in so far as it is an aid to such appreciation. It is especially desirable that the student should not think of the study of the poets, for example, as consisting chiefly in the study of what other people have written about them.

Yet it is hardly practicable to dispense with the text-book altogether. The earliest authors that have usually been read by the under-classmen in Yale College, for example, are Spenser and Shakespeare. The writers who cannot be enjoyed without some preliminary linguistic study have been reserved for a later place in the curriculum; but even Spenser and Shakespeare, and their period, can best be taken up after at least a slight knowledge of the earlier history of our literature has been acquired.

This book has been written to supply what the author's experience has shown to be a real need. Its purpose is to give to those who do not, for the present at least, require an intimate acquaintance with Old and Middle English authors, such a knowledge of their characteristics and historical relations as may serve for an intro-

duction to the study of the Elizabethan and later periods. Several other books covering much of the same ground are easily available; but they are either very elementary in treatment or so crowded with barren statements of unimportant facts as to defeat the purpose just suggested. Mere digests of names and dates may be excellent for reference, or as companions to actual reading, but they cannot profitably be used alone for continuous study.

The present work is designed as a sort of compromise. It is not a history of our early literature, but an introduction to the history of our later literature. It does not give an account of all our early writers, nor even of all the important ones; but it selects striking representatives of a few great facts in the history of our literature, and attempts to give a sufficiently full account of them to impress the student's imagination and leave some distinct trace in his memory. A few extracts, in translation, are given from the older writers, and longer passages are given in the original from such works as can be made fairly intelligible with the aid of occasional glosses. In the longest selections, the line numbering of the original text is noted in the margin, to facilitate either class-room reference or consultation of commentaries.

The first chapter is inserted because of a grievous need within the writer's own experience. Students ought to know something of English history before they approach the history of English literature, but in fact they often do not; and this chapter, therefore, as well as several minor passages in the later chapters, seemed indispensable. The second chapter is not necessary to the stu-

dent of literary history, but it is desirable that he should not be ignorant of the facts contained in it, for literature and language do not develop in entire independence of each other. Moreover, it will doubtless be found useful in the early part of a college course to give the student some knowledge of the general nature of linguistic studies, if only that he may be intelligently guided in his choice of more advanced courses.

The book is novel in plan, but it was, of course, no essential part of its plan to give new facts or new views. The author has freely availed himself of the researches of others. His chief indebtedness is to Lounsbury's and Emerson's Histories, for the materials of the second chapter; but a detailed acknowledgment would include Morley, ten Brink, Skeat, Gaston Paris, Petit de Julleville, Cook, Eicken, Wülker, Trevelyan, Andrew D. White, Brooke, Nutt, Seebohm, and many others.

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# EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### THE MAKING OF THE RACE

1. **Prehistoric Britain.** — Since the beginning of British history Britain has been a home for several races, but all have belonged to the Indo-European family. It is known, however, that at least three other races occupied the island before. Our knowledge of these three is obtained from fossils, stone implements, burial mounds, and other similar remains. The first race seem to have been not very much more civilized than the beasts that they killed and ate. The second used stone weapons with wooden handles, and were fond of scratching rude pictures on bones, or other substances; they are thought to have been related to the modern Esquimaux. The third were Iberians, like the modern Basques of the Pyrenees Mountains. Of these three races, the first two have probably passed away altogether from the British Islands, but it is supposed that the Iberians have left descendants by intermarriage among all the Indo-European races of the West. The Iberians of Britain were able to spin and weave, till the ground, and sail the sea. They had some tribal organization, and built rude fortifications. They were barbarians, but hardly savages.

The first Indo-Europeans to reach Britain were of the Celtic branch of the family. They came several centuries before the Christian era, and either exterminated or absorbed their predecessors. They were in Britain when the island first became known to the civilized world, and their descendants still inhabit Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and even parts of England. The early Celts, unlike the Iberians, were learning the use of iron; they lived in wattled huts of clay, sticks, and reeds; they had a well-developed tribal organization, with chieftains and aristocracy at the head; and they had a polytheistic religion vaguely similar to that of the Greeks and Romans. They had some savage customs, such as that of tattooing their bodies, and perhaps (in the earliest times) polyandry; and their druids, who were at once priests, physicians, judges, and counsellors, sometimes offered human sacrifices to their gods; but in general their civilization was much higher than that of the Iberians.

**2. The Roman Period.** — Celtic Britain was known commercially to southern Europe long before the time of Cæsar, but Cæsar's invasion is practically the beginning of the island's authentic history. Even this event was of less moment than is sometimes supposed, for Cæsar did not conquer Britain; perhaps, indeed, he never intended to do more than terrorize the inhabitants, and so ensure the peace of Gaul. He was in Britain for less than three months, and he left no material evidences of his two expeditions.

About a century later, however, Claudius invaded Britain as a conqueror, and until the year 411 the south-

ern part of the island was a Roman possession. Rome lost nearly as much as she gained by the conquest, for Britain swallowed up legions almost as fast as it yielded spoils; but a great change was wrought in the island itself. The Romans did not slaughter those whom they could just as well pacify, and during the Roman period, therefore, southern Britain was at least outwardly civilized. Roman roads were arteries of commerce as well as of warfare; Roman villas superseded the old wattled wigwams; Roman theatres, baths, and temples, and the Latin language, all became familiar to the conquered race. The blessings of civilization, however, were dearly bought. The Britons paid, as taxes on their land, a tenth and sometimes even a fifth of its annual produce. They paid taxes for maintenance of troops, taxes for entertainment of officials, taxes for repairing roads, taxes for carrying stocks of merchandise, and taxes upon succession to inheritances; they paid poll-taxes, customs and market dues, and fees for license to do ordinary labor; and all these taxes were collected by foreign officials, with little restraint, doubtless, upon corruption. The fighting men of the subject Britons were deported to wage Rome's wars elsewhere, and in those who remained in the island vigorous manhood and the love of freedom became nearly extinct. When the last Roman legions were withdrawn, it was not because the Britons were able to shake off the yoke, but because the empire itself was decaying, and Rome needed all her strength for self-defense.

**3. The Last of the Britons.** — One reason why the Roman colony in Britain was so hard to maintain was that

it was subject to continual depredations from the north and east. The Scots, and other Celtic races in northern Britain and Ireland, were not reached by Roman civilization, and were a constant terror to their enervated kinsmen in the south; and for at least a century before the Romans left, the eastern coast was familiar with the Saxon pirates from across the sea. After the final withdrawal of Roman protection, fruitless appeals were made for further aid. One famous message said: "To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons. The barbarians drive us to the sea; the sea drives us back to the barbarians; we are either slaughtered or drowned."

In addition to these troubles, the Britons suffered from domestic disorders. Rome had left them only half civilized. The upper classes continued to speak Latin, and doubtless would have been glad to maintain the Roman system of civil and military discipline; but the old tribal feeling was too strong, and whatever manhood was left in the mass of the population wasted itself in petty tribal squabbles. Christianity had reached the island a century or two before the Romans left it, but after their departure it seems to have become more nominal than real, and life outside of the largest towns was vicious and violent.

Two notable names stand out from the very obscure history of these times — those of Patricius and Ambrosius Aurelianus. The former was a native of Scotland, but was kidnapped in his boyhood and sold as a slave in Ireland. After suffering many hardships he was able to devote himself to the reformation of the country;

he became a bishop of the Irish Church, and has ever since been its patron saint. Ambrosius Aurelianus, on the other hand (or perhaps simply Ambrosius), is the probable original of the legendary King Arthur. His name survives in the name of Amesbury (Ambroseburg), a town often mentioned in Arthurian story; and the curious fortification still extant on Salisbury plain may well have been one of his strongholds. As the piratical invaders from the east penetrated farther into the heart of Britain, Ambrosius for a long time made a successful stand against them. He is the supposed hero of at least one real British victory, that at Mt. Badon about the year 516; but the legendary Arthur, who overthrew the Saxons in twelve great battles and made a realm and reigned, is like a composite photograph, being credited with the deeds of many others besides Ambrosius, as well as countless deeds that were never done at all.

**4. The Coming of the English.** — The barbarian invaders from over the sea, who first harried the coasts of Britain and finally conquered the island, were known to the Britons as Saxons, but it would be more proper to call them English. They were in fact of three kindred tribes — Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Soon after the Roman garrisons were withdrawn, these people began making permanent settlements on the British coasts. Gradually they pressed inland, and by about 600 they had become possessed of the greater part of what is now England. They came from the southern part of the Danish peninsula, and the adjacent coast stretching westward towards the Rhine. The Jutes, the least

important of the three tribes, settled only Kent an a few inland districts. The Saxons[1] took the rest c Britain south of the Thames, spreading as far to th west as they could; and the Angles seized the easter coast north of the Thames, and gradually pushed inlan all along the line. The Angles were the most numerou and probably the most intellectual; and they (unlike th Saxons and Jutes) came as a whole nation, bringing the national life and leaving their old home desolate. Civ lization and culture developed among them in norther England earlier and faster than among the Saxons c Jutes in the south, and both Saxons and Jutes began very early times to speak of themselves too as "En lish."

These English were Germanic peoples, and their re gion was akin to other Germanic religions. Early in th seventh century they were Christianized by Roman mi sionaries, but the names of some of their original deiti still survive in our names of days: Tiu's day, Woden day, etc. Moreover, Christianity by no means reconcil them with their Celtic predecessors in Britain. Sco land, and for a long time the western part of Englan remained independent and hostile. The fate of th British in the conquered parts of the island is not ve definitely known, but certainly many were slain a almost as certainly many others were retained as wiv or as slaves. The English race therefore had from th time on a strain of Celtic blood.

[1] The modern kingdom of Saxony has no connection with the ancie tribe. It w[illegible]rbitrarily named, at a much later date, and its inh itants are no[illegible]axons at all, in the strict sense.

By the end of the sixth century seven distinct kingoms, commonly known as the Heptarchy, were established in Britain. At that time the kingdom of Kent was the most powerful of the Heptarchy, and its king exercised some sort of overlordship over most of the others. In the seventh and eighth centuries the Anglian kingdoms of Northumberland and Mercia attained a similar position, and in the eighth and ninth centuries in turn the kingdom of the West Saxons came to the front. Thus Jutes, Angles, and Saxons enjoyed the supremacy in succession. There was for a long time no real political unity; but all were English, all spoke English, and all felt a strong unifying force in the church; for they had not one church of Wessex and another of Kent, but a single ecclesiastical organization for the whole Heptarchy. Therefore, after several generations of West Saxon overlordship, and especially after it became necessary to unite against common foes, the kings of Wessex naturally came to be in reality kings of England.

**5. Ælfred and the Danes.** A general westward migration of races was going on in northern Europe throughout the dark ages, and it did not stop in England with the arrival of the English. As they had harried the Britons, so various tribes of Northmen now harried them. These Scandinavian barbarians had moved outward over the Danish peninsula, but were probably turned back by the powerful Germanic empire of Charlemagne, and in the eighth century they began to attack the eastern coast of England. In the middle of the ninth century they began making settlements,

instead of mere raids, and the Danes, the most vigorou of all the Northmen, speedily overpowered the norther and eastern members of the Heptarchy.

Ælfred came to the throne of the West Saxons in 87 just as the Danes were beginning to attack Wesse itself. Ælfred was one of the really great men i history, and he showed his greatness in his long ar bitter struggle with the enemy. Sometimes he be them off by superiority of force or strategy; sometime when less successful, he bought them off; but they ha little fear of force and less respect for treaties, and th peace therefore was never long. One season's campaig resulted in seemingly irretrievable disaster, and the kin himself passed many weeks as a refugee, hiding swamps and woodland; but he was secretly rallying h forces and time was weakening the Danes, and the ne season witnessed a complete turn of fortune. Th worst of the struggle ended in a truce of uncertain dat sometimes called the Peace of Wedmore, by which th Danes were bound to keep within certain limits, an Wessex was freed of them. The future of England a an English rather than Danish nation was thus assure

These Danes of the north and east constituted separate nation in England, and for a long time aft Ælfred's death they contended with the English for th mastery. The south finally won a decisive victory the battle of Brunanburh in 937, and after this th Danes gradually became a part of the English natio They accepted civilization and Christianity, and as th genius of their language was much like that of the En lish, the l[redacted]r was easy for their children to learn. B

new hordes of Danes were continually appearing on the coast. Even Ælfred, after the Peace of Wedmore, had to defend himself against newcomers. He met and defeated them at sea, and for this reason has somewhat fantastically been called the founder of the English navy. Some of the later kings were less successful, and the Danish raids culminated in a sweeping conquest in 1013. English and Anglicized Northmen united against the new invaders, but they were defeated; and in 1016 Cnut the Dane became undisputed king of England.

This conquest, however, was military rather than national. The English army and royal family were overthrown, but the country was not overrun with foreigners. Cnut was a wise ruler, and he wielded his power for all England, not for the newly arrived Danes alone. Consequently, although three successive Danish kings sat on the throne, England remained England, and the effect of the conquest upon its life and its later literature was surprisingly small.

**6. The Norman Conquest.** — Britain was not the only western country preyed upon by the Northmen. Early in the tenth century they seized parts of the northern coast of France, and made the district now called Normandy their own. As the Danes in England became English, so these Northmen or Normans in France became French. The Scandinavian, while no less hardy than the Englishman, seemed always readier to adapt himself to new ways of living.

The policy of the Norman dukes was to ally themselves intimately with both France and England, and before the middle of the eleventh century the Normans and

the English were therefore closely related by commerce, travel, and intermarriage. Many Normans had settled permanently in England, and some had risen to high positions of influence. Otherwise the success of the Normans in the coming struggle could hardly have been so easy as it was.

When William, the Duke of the Normans, formed the design of invading England, it was easy to find pretexts. For example, he was a cousin of the English king, and the latter promised him the succession; when, therefore, upon the king's death, the crown was given to Harold, this violated promise afforded William an argument of some practical value, though of no legal validity whatever. He sent a message demanding the throne, which was refused. Thereupon, in 1066, reinforcing his own army with adventurers from all quarters, he crossed the channel. His undertaking had seemed to many of his advisers almost hopeless, and indeed at the battle of Senlac (or Hastings) he narrowly escaped ruin; but the English, though they had an impregnable position, were undone by bad generalship and worse discipline. Harold was killed, and William, after this one overwhelming victory, had only to bide his time patiently until the English should themselves invite him to take the crown. The conquest was thus completed by the peaceful process of law.

This conquest resembled that by the Danes more than that of the Celtic Britons by the English. The Normans spread over the upper surface of English life, occupying the high places but leaving the English masses comparatively in peace. They never came over

in very great numbers, and even now there are comparatively few in the middle or lower classes who can boast of Norman blood. But, on the other hand, unlike the Danes, the Normans were acclimatized slowly. For a long time the language of the schools and of court life was French or Latin; and the spirit of English life, while by no means wholly revolutionized, did, as we shall see, undergo many changes.

7. **The Feudal System.** — One of the most important changes effected by the Norman Conquest was the introduction of the feudal system. This was a system of government under which every powerful lord had many vassals, tenants of his lands, who were ready to fight his battles for him, and whom he in turn was bound to protect. Each of these tenants might be lord over subtenants of his own, while the first lord was perhaps himself a tenant and vassal of the king. This system had become well developed on the continent before the conquest, but in England it had existed only in a rudimentary form.

The bond between lord and tenant, under the feudal system, was something more than a mere contract. It was more like a contract of marriage than like a modern lease of land. The relation was commonly effected by a peculiar ceremony called "commendation." The tenant uncovered his head, loosed his belt, and kneeling, with his hands between those of his lord, took a personal oath of fealty, and thus became his "man" or "vassal." The rights of the master over his man were in some respects almost rights of property; yet in general the system involved no loss of dignity on the vassal's part.

William himself, as Duke of Normandy, was a vassal of the King of France, but this fact merely symbolized, in the mediæval fashion, the honorable relation between the duchy and the kingdom.

The political and military effects of the feudal system in England were far-reaching. The lands of those who opposed William at Senlac, or elsewhere, were confiscated and bestowed upon the Conqueror's vassals. England thus became subject to him not only as king but also as feudal overlord. On the continent William had seen that feudalism created a strong centrifugal tendency, for the great barons were often able to wield enormous power, and they were naturally often tempted to assert their virtual independence of the crown. This he sought to prevent in England by a modification of the continental system; and he accordingly required each important landowner in his new kingdom to take the oath of fealty, not merely to his immediate superior, but also to himself as supreme overlord. This precaution made it impossible for England to be split up into a number of independent seigniories, and while it did not prevent many bitter conflicts between the power of the crown and that of the greater barons, it did materially help to make the supremacy of the former secure.

In the history of literature, however, the social workings of the feudal system are still more important. The idea of knighthood grew out of the feudal relation, and out of the knightly fashions of the time grew the literary ideals of chivalry. The feudal system was probably of most benefit to such as could attain to knighthood, fo the knights were the aristocracy of the age; and w

shall expect, in consequence, to find the literature of the middle ages essentially aristocratic in tone.

**8. England after the Conquest.** — In Normandy, William had been merely Duke of the Normans. This rank carried no absolute power; it would not be far from the truth to say that he was but the chief one (the *dux*) of many barons. In England, as king, it was necessary for him to assert a higher function, if the unity of the kingdom was to be assured. The greater Norman barons naturally preferred to regard him merely as their feudal overlord, to whom they had done homage; but William insisted that they were not merely his vassals but also his subjects. For the first century or more after the conquest, the chief historical events in England were the struggles of the kings with the greater barons. The kings who were wise enlisted on their side the sympathies of the lesser barons and of the common people, and thus the interests of many of the Normans were consolidated with those of the English. This was one of the ways in which the two peoples became gradually fused into one.

In 1204 England lost Normandy, and this seeming misfortune was in fact a great benefit. It became necessary for the Norman barons to retire to Normandy, or else to give up their Norman possessions and become really Englishmen. This was another aid to the fusion of the races. The Norman families retained their distinct identity for a long time; as a rule, they continued to speak French for two or three centuries after the conquest. A historical work, finished about 1360, says that "children in school, against the usage and manner

of all other nations, are compelled to leave their own language, and to construe their lessons and their matters in French, and have, since the Normans came first into England. Also, gentlemen's children are taught to speak French from the time that they are rocked in their cradle, . . . and rustics wish to make themselves like gentlemen, and strive with great earnestness to speak French, in order to be thought the more of." It is clear, however, that even at the time when this was written, this state of things was coming to an end. A statute of 1362 made English the language of courts of justice, and a historian who wrote in 1385 says that at that date the children in the schools were using English instead of French. It seems, from this and other evidence, that in the course of the fourteenth century English became the family language of all classes; and when this happened, the distinction between the Norman and English races ceased to be of much practical importance.

## CHAPTER II

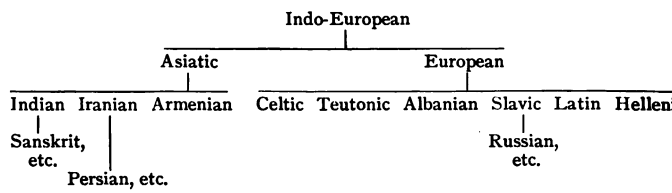
### THE MAKING OF THE LANGUAGE

**9. The Indo-European Family.** — A family of languages is a group of languages so similar to one another in structure and vocabulary as to compel the belief that they are all descended from some common ancestor. There are about a hundred such families in existence, of which the Indo-European, Semitic, Hamitic, and Turanian are the best known. All the Turanian languages, for example, such as Finnish, Turkish, and Mongolian, afford evidences of more or less close kinship with one another; but between them and the Semitic languages, such as Hebrew, there is no more similarity than may be due to occasional borrowings, or perhaps to mere chance.

The members of the Indo-European family are now scattered over Europe and Asia, and both the languages themselves and the people who speak them differ widely among themselves; but it is indisputable that the languages are descended from a common parent speech, and it seems probable that most of the peoples who speak them are descended from one parent race. It is possible, from internal evidence, to learn much about the parent race and language. For example, from the presence in many widely scattered members of the family of cognate words for "father," "mother," "grandson,"

etc., we are clearly safe in arguing that the original Indo-Europeans had a well-developed domestic life. From similar evidence it is almost as conclusively shown that they were a pastoral people who knew the uses of milk and honey. Efforts have been made to locate their original home by showing what kinds of animals and plants were known to them, but the evidence is very uncertain. Perhaps they lived on the northern shores of the Black Sea, perhaps somewhere in central Asia. At any rate, they separated many centuries before the beginning of their recorded history.

The whole Indo-European family is divisible into smaller groups or branches. For example, the English and German languages are more closely related to each other than to French or Welsh; and this fact is indicated by saying that they belong to the Teutonic branch of the family, while French belongs to the Latin branch, and Welsh to the Celtic. There are six other branches generally recognized, their mutual relationship being indicated in the following table; but these three are of most interest in our present study, and the Teutonic branch is the only one that we need consider in detail.




**10. The Teutonic Branch.** — In the last section it was said that English and German are more nearly

related than English and French. This fact is somewhat obscured by the great influence exercised by French over English in modern times. After the Norman Conquest so many French words became naturalized in English that French now seems to many students less foreign than German; but in order to assign our language to the proper branch of the Indo-European family, we must consider only blood relations, not relations by adoption; we must look at English as it was in its infancy, before it was exposed to Latin and French influences. When we do this we find that English is unmistakably Teutonic.

The Teutonic languages are distinguished from those of other branches by a large number of very old words which belong to them in common, and to them exclusively; but there are two other peculiarities besides those of vocabulary which enable us most decisively to prove their mutual relationship. One of these peculiarities is a certain uniformity, or law, as to the accentuation of words. The original law of Teutonic accent was, in brief, that the root syllable received the stress, except in nouns and adjectives, which accented the first syllable. If a word was inflected, the accent did not vary with the inflectional endings. In Latin, on the other hand, the accent depended on the quantity of the penult; and in Greek it in part depended on the quantity of syllables, and in part was seemingly arbitrary. Compare, for example, *begins* with *incĭpit; brother, brotherhood* with *socius, societas;* and try to find a parallel in English or German for λύω, λέλυκα, λελυκέναι, λελυκώς! This Teutonic law of accent is part of the genius of the

Teutonic languages, and shows amazing persistency even in modern English, after centuries of linguistic adulteration. The noun and the verb *produce*, with their different accents, illustrate the still prevailing tendency to throw back the accent of substantives.

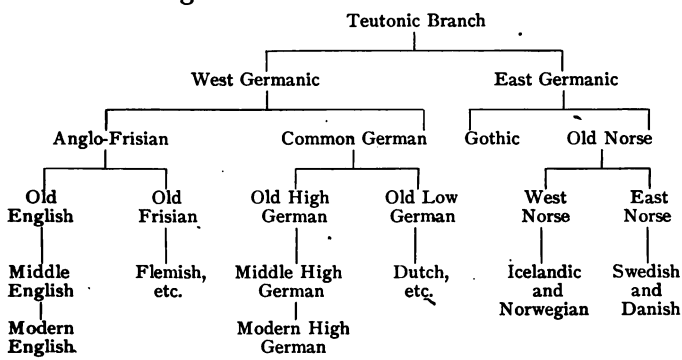
The second distinguishing feature of the Teutonic languages is a peculiar change which their consonants have suffered. The consonant sounds chiefly affected are those known to students of Greek grammar as the three classes of mutes, viz.:

labial mutes, $\pi$, $\beta$, $\phi$.
palatal mutes, $\kappa$, $\gamma$, $\chi$.
lingual mutes, $\tau$, $\delta$, $\theta$.

The change referred to is as follows: Words in the original Indo-European language which were retained in the Teutonic branch, in many cases changed the second consonant in each of these classes to the first, and the first to the third. Thus, if there was a $\beta$ in the Indo-European word, it became $\pi$ in the Teutonic; $\gamma$ became $\kappa$; $\tau$ became $\theta$, and so on through the list. The law of this consonant shift was discovered by Grimm, and is known as Grimm's Law. Examples are seen in the English *foot*, German *Fuss*; *cf.* Greek πούς, Latin *pes*, in which the initial consonant preserves the original Indo-European form. So English *know*, German *kennen*, from the same root as γιγνώσκω, *cognosco*; English *hen*, German *Hahn*, from the same root as κανάζω, *canere*. In the last example the sound of $\chi$ is represented by a less guttural aspirate, *h*. This law is not universal in its application, but the exceptions to it are

governed by regular laws of their own. These, however, need not be considered here.

**11. English as a Teutonic Language.** — Each of the nine great branches of the family underwent further ramifications of its own. Thus from the Latin branch sprang in ancient times the language of the Samnites, and in more modern times all the eight so-called romance languages, chief among which are French, Italian, and Spanish. The history of the Teutonic branch is shown in the following table:




It must be kept in mind that the ancestral language designated in the table as "Teutonic" is not in existence, and that no express record of it has ever been found; but by comparing the existing Indo-European languages we can prove that such a tongue must have been spoken at some remote past time; in other words, the ancestors of all the Teutonic peoples probably kept together and spoke a common language for a long time after they separated from the other branches of the family. In like manner the Anglo-Frisian, the West

and East Germanic, and the Common German are purely hypothetical languages; the only evidence of their past existence is found by comparative study of the younger tongues now extant; but that evidence is in most cases conclusive.

The table, therefore, merely presents graphically the inferences drawn by students of comparative linguistics. Such students do not always agree. Some, for example, reject the notion of an Anglo-Frisian tongue altogether, and derive from the West Germanic two groups of modern Germanic languages, the high and the low. What we ordinarily call "German" is Modern High German; while English, Flemish, and Dutch, according to this view, should all be regarded as belonging to the Low German group.

Whichever view we take of this matter, one distinctive feature of High German is worth noting. When we compare English and German cognate words, we often find their general likeness partly obscured by a difference in consonants. Close study has shown that this difference is due to a second change which High German has suffered, along the line pointed out by Grimm's law. According to Grimm's law, certain consonants moved up one step in their respective classes, in the days before English and German separated; according to another law, recently discovered, some of these consonants took a second step in the same direction, after the separation; but this second step was in general taken only in the High German member of the branch. Thus we find in German *dick* for the English *thick; Dorn* for *thorn; durch* for *through; Durst* for *thirst;*

*Tau* for *dew*; *teuer* for *dear*; *Tier* for *deer*; etc. In some cases by comparing Latin or Greek with English and German, we can see the progress of both consonant changes in the same word. For example, the initial consonant of the word represented in Greek by τόνος, and in Latin by *tonare*, suffered by Grimm's law before it appeared in the English *thunder*, and then in High German suffered the second change before it finally appeared as *d* in *Donner*.

**12. Old English.** — When the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes came to Britain, they did not speak exactly alike; but the differences were so slight that we regard them as speaking not three languages but three dialects of one language. That one language is often called Anglo-Saxon, and this name is correct enough, as the Angle and Saxon members of the invading people were so much more numerous than the Jutes; but it is now more customary to speak of it as Old English. This name serves better to indicate the relation of the language to modern English, and it also presents a convenient parallel to the accepted names of Old High German, Old French, Old Norse, etc. The English of the later middle ages, after the Norman Conquest, is commonly called Middle English.

Of the three original forms of Old English, that spoken by the Angles has proved of most importance in the history of the language. It split up at an early date into two dialects, called Northumbrian and Mercian, after the names of the two chief Anglian kingdoms in the Heptarchy. From the speech of the Saxons also there sprang several different dialects, but the foremost

of them was the West Saxon, that of Ælfred's kingdom. These three dialects — Northumbrian, Mercian, and West-Saxon — were spoken in the northern, midland, and southern parts of English Britain, respectively. Owing to the long political supremacy of Wessex, the southern dialect attained a decided literary supremacy toward the end of the Old English period, and nearly all the Old English literature that has come down to us is written in West Saxon. Several centuries later, however, after the Norman Conquest, the speech of the midland counties became the prevailing dialect, and from it grew our modern English language. Thus it appears that the standard Old English was not the parent of the standard modern English, in the strictest sense; but the connection between the different parts of England was so close, even in early times, that the dialects influenced each other very materially, and modern English therefore contains many words which owe their form to the northern or southern dialect rather than to the Mercian. Indeed it is hardly fair to say that it is descended from the Mercian dialect at all, except in a geographical sense.

Old English, in all its dialectic forms, was a much more synthetic language than our modern tongue. There were several declensions of nouns, with from four to six distinct case-forms, and two declensions of adjectives corresponding to those of modern German. Verbs, too, were somewhat more freely inflected than they are now. The language, of course, lacked nearly all our words of Latin origin, and while much of its vocabulary has remained, it possessed many Teutonic

words which have been lost. The student will have little difficulty in identifying the following specimen:

On anginne gescēop God heofonan and eorðan.[1] Sēo eorðe wæs īdel and ǣmtig; and ðīestru wǣron ofer ðǣre nēowolnesse brādnesse; and Godes gāst wæs gefered ofer wæteru. God cwæð ðā, "Geweorðe lēoht"; and lēoht wearð geworht.

**13. Latin and Old French.** — The French are a Celtic race, but their language is not a Celtic language. They lost their original tongue when the Romans conquered Gaul. It will be remembered that Roman rule in Britain never wholly Latinized the British Celts; but the fortune of their Gallic cousins was far different. This was because Gaul became a Roman province a whole century earlier, and because it was nearer to Rome. Thus it came about that before the Roman Empire itself was endangered by barbarian foes, there had been ample time for the Gauls to become in effect Romans. They spoke Latin, not that of Cicero and Vergil, but the Low Latin of the Roman camps. This Low Latin, in the mouths of people without any literature, became more and more perverted, and finally assumed the forms which we know as the Romance languages. In Spain it became Spanish, in France it became French, or, as we call the language of the middle ages, Old French.

The change from Low Latin to French may be briefly described as a process of crushing. The most striking fact about it is that the accented syllable of a Latin word was retained, though perhaps altered; but the syllables before the accent were frequently crushed

[1] The character ð represents the sound of the modern *th*.

together, or syncopated, and those after the accent were regularly lopped off altogether, or replaced by an *e* mute. Thus *caballum* becomes *cheval*, *damnaticum* becomes *dommage*, *exfrigidare* becomes *effrayer*, *patrem* becomes *père*. The permanence of the accented syllable accounts for some interesting phenomena in the case of words which change their accent with inflectional endings. Thus from *senior* and *seniorem* came the doublets *sire* and *seigneur*; from *trovator* and *trovatorem*, *trouvère* and *troubadour*.

This crushing process was, of course, only one of a number of changes which regularly took place in the passage from Latin into French. It will serve, however, as a type, and will suggest how complicated has been the history of those Latin words which have found their way through the French into our own language. Here, however, caution must be observed. The most common of our Latin words came to us by reason of the Norman Conquest; they were French before they became English; but we have also received Latin words from other sources. In the first place, the Celtic Britons used Latin freely, and they doubtless contributed a very few Latin words to the vocabulary of their English conquerors. *Mount* is probably an example; and the endings *-caster* and *-chester* in names of English towns indicate the sites of fortified camps (*castra*) in the period of Roman occupation. In the second place, several hundred words came from direct contact between Rome and the English before the Norman Conquest. We might think, for example, that because the word *butter* occurs in both English and German, it must have belonged to

the common Teutonic stock; but in fact it is not improbable that the Teutonic races never ate the article until they heard of it from the Romans as *buterium*. Thirdly, a vast number of words have been knowingly borrowed from the Latin in more modern times. Such a word as *unintelligibility* did not, of course, pass naturally from Latin through French to English; it was created bodily by some person with a classical education, who was consciously adapting means to ends. Such words are often easily distinguishable from those of natural growth, for they have not gone through the crushing process. For example, *legalitatem* became in Old French *loyalté*. Modern French has it in the form *loyauté*, but it grew into English before it lost the second *l*, and our *loyalty* is the result. The word *legality*, on the other hand, is a learned word from the same original. It should be noted that the latter word preserves the Latin sense, as well as its form, more purely than the other.

**14. The Development of Middle English.** — For three centuries after the Norman Conquest two languages were spoken in England. French and English did not mix, because the two races held apart, and we therefore find that English remained comparatively pure for about a century. It is usual to assign the date 1150 for the end of Old and the beginning of Middle English, but of course it must be understood that the change was a gradual one. A Norman baron perhaps had an English wife; certainly he had English tenants and servants, and in later times he had common political interests with Englishmen of all classes. The two races had to speak a common language, and the language they gradually

learned to speak was a compromise between English and French. Naturally enough, words in the new language which were more often used by the court circles were of French origin, while the everyday words of common people were English. Readers of *Ivanhoe* will remember that what the English herdsman called *ox* became *beef* when it was killed and dressed for the Norman's board. In like manner we inherit from Old English most such words as *land*, *tree*, *grass*, *field*, *sew*, *sow*, *reap*, *mow*, *bake*; while from French come such words as *armor*, *homage*, *park*, *peer*, *ransom*, *castle*, *tapestry*, *duke*.

The French and English words in the new language were about equally numerous; but nevertheless the French element is of comparatively very small importance in either Middle or Modern English. This is for two reasons. In the first place, the English words are those that we use oftenest. "The article *the*, for illustration, is found in nearly every sentence of Shakespeare; but in estimating his whole vocabulary it is reckoned for no more than, for instance, *cousin-german* or *fanatical*, either one of which appears only once in all his writings."[1] An author who uses as many French as English words may easily use the latter so much oftener that the total French element in his style will amount to only ten or fifteen per cent.

In the second place, the inflections of the new speech were English rather than French. These are what mark the real controlling genius of a language. When we borrow a French verb, for example, we naturally

[1] Lounsbury, *History of the English Language*, p. 105.

conjugate it according to English custom. It would be as absurd to say *I reconnais* for *I reconnoitred* as to say *I telegrapsa* for *I telegraphed.* This is because the essentials of English grammar are deeply rooted in the consciousness of every one of us. The same thing was true in the Middle English period, and the French words then taken in were subjected to a thoroughly English treatment.

Still, the French language did exert a considerable influence upon English syntax, and even upon English forms. It aided largely in making English an analytic rather than a synthetic language; that is, in substituting the use of prepositions and auxiliaries for inflectional endings. We say *to send* instead of *sendan*, and *the face of the deep* for *ðaere nēowolnesse brādnesse.* In Old English such analytic phrases were not uncommon, and there was a growing tendency to favor them; but the French influence doubtless strengthened this tendency materially. The loss of inflectional endings was natural under the circumstances, for they are hard things for a foreigner to master.

The Old English plural ended sometimes in *-as*, sometimes in *-an;* sometimes it was formed in other ways, as by modifying the root vowel. We have survivals of the three forms specified in the plurals of *day*, *ox*, and *man*, respectively. In French the plural was regularly formed by adding *s*, and therefore the tendency of Normans would naturally be to favor the first of the three English modes of declension. In fact, the *s* form became almost invariable in Middle and Modern English, and this may be ascribed largely to French influence. So also the

increased use of *more* and *most* in the comparison of adjectives, and the almost total loss of gender in English substantives, would be natural results of the foreigner's confusion of mind, although we cannot say that without French influence they would not have occurred at all.

**15. English Dialects.** — In the Middle English period the language was still by no means the same throughout England. The three principal dialects — Northern, Midland, and Southern — were descended from the Northumbrian, Mercian, and West Saxon of the Old English period, though with so much adulteration from each other and from outside that their descent is thoroughly obscured. The three can by no means be defined by exact geographical limits, though in a general way the Humber and the Thames may be regarded as marking their boundaries; for in the same region different classes of people often spoke differently, and in the speech of many there was some mixture of dialects. Nevertheless the local characteristics were striking enough, and while comparatively few spoke a single dialect in perfect purity, there were several recognized standards, and each person conformed to one of them with more or less strictness. For example, in the North the usual form for "we hope" was *we hopes*, while the Midland was *we hopen*, and the Southern *we hopeth*. Literature was produced in all three dialects, but when a northern manuscript was copied by a southern or midland clerk there was naturally some confusion of forms, and we therefore have in our extant mediæval literature a mixture which sometimes proves very puzzling.

These dialects still survive, but there is no longer a triple standard. As communication became easier, and education more general, one or another of the dialects necessarily had to take the lead. The favored one, as it happened, was the Midland, and especially that variety known as East Midland. The reason for this was chiefly that London, Oxford, and Cambridge were all in the eastern midland counties, and the court and the universities thus combined to fix a standard for educated men. Well-defined dialects of English are still spoken in Yorkshire, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, and elsewhere, but only by the less educated classes. In America the old dialects hardly exist at all, for a Yorkshire immigrant does not generally settle among neighbors who speak like himself; and his children, in consequence, are not limited to his dialect. Most native Americans, therefore, talk substantially alike, but two uneducated workingmen from opposite corners of England can hardly understand each other.

The northern dialect has had a more illustrious history than the southern, for it developed into what we now call Scotch. This, of course, is very different from the Gaelic of the Scotch Highlands, which is a Celtic language. Scotch is not a distinct language at all, but a dialect of English. The reason why it has maintained such a comparatively independent position is that Scotland until 1603 was a separate kingdom. As East Midland attained supremacy over the other dialects, it gradually became the standard speech in England north of the Humber; but across the Scottish border there was a separate national life, and the influences of London,

Oxford, and Cambridge were hardly felt. The Scotch people of the fifteenth century called their language English, and it had as good a right to the name as the English of England. It was only upon the union of the kingdoms that the northern dialect lost its independent position. Until Shakespeare's time any Scotchman who wrote a book would naturally use his own form of the language. Now it is hardly written at all, except to give local color in songs or novels, or for other special purposes.

**16. Miscellaneous Foreign Influences.** — The great majority of words in the dictionary are foreign-born, but the native words are the blood and bone of the language. With the exception of the mediæval French influence, already pointed out, no foreign influence has materially affected its spirit. An enormous number of comparatively recent borrowings, such as *czar*, *banyan*, *caoutchouc*, help to swell our vocabulary, but the real genius of the language owes nothing to Poland, Hindustan, or South America; and a similar assertion might be made, though with less absolute truth, of the learned and scientific words from Greek and Latin, such as *electricity*, *locomotive*, *cryptogram*.

There are two languages, however, which we should expect to find exerting a considerable influence on our own, namely, the Celtic language of the early Britons and the Old Norse. Many efforts have been made to identify the Celtic elements in English, and there are long lists of English words which have their analogues in Welsh, or Gaelic, or even Irish. Among these are *basket*, *garter*, *button*, *pail*, *gown*, *pot*, *bug*; and it is argued that when the English conquered the Celts the

latter lived among them only as slaves or wives, and these are just the sort of words that would be likely, under those circumstances, to creep in. In fact, however, it is generally impossible to prove that such words were not borrowed by the Celts from the English; their mere presence in two languages proves nothing. Moreover, they may have come down in both languages from the original Indo-European. The proportion of words that can be proved to have come to us from the early Britons is infinitesimal. The Celtic languages seem somehow to have been made of very perishable stuff, for that spoken in Gaul also disappeared almost entirely under the Roman rule.

With Old Norse, the language of the early Danes, the case is somewhat different. Several hundred words were undoubtedly contributed from this source, and they are words which count, for they are of the homely, everyday sort. There is, however, great difficulty in identifying them. The Danes settled chiefly in the north, and the influence of Old Norse was therefore exerted chiefly on the northern dialect of Old English. Since, therefore, almost all the extant specimens of Old English are in West Saxon, it is only in the Middle English period, some three centuries or more after their introduction, that these words become very conspicuous in our literature. Moreover, Old Norse and Old English were closely related languages, and therefore, when we find in a thirteenth-century writer a word that was unquestionably good Norse, we cannot always be sure that it was not good Old English also; it may be a mere chance that no early West Saxon writer put it in a book.

# CHAPTER III

## OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

**17. Widsith.** — About the time of the Norman C quest, a certain Bishop of Exeter presented to cathedral a valuable collection of manuscript poe all fastened together in the form of one book. T collection is still extant under the name of the Ex Book, although it has suffered considerably from w and fire, and it is one of our chief sources of informa about Old English. Concerning some of the po which it contains, we have knowledge from ot sources also, so that we can name their authors fix their dates; but many of them are known to solely by their inclusion in this book.

One of the latter, a poem of 143 lines, begins v the words "Wīdsīð maðolade, wordhord onlēa that is, "Widsith spoke, unlocked (his) word-hoa The first word is evidently used as a proper name, it seems to mean "Wide-way," or (more intelligi "the far-traveler." After a few introductory lines come to what Widsith said, and the rest of the poe in the first person. It gives a rather unliterary c logue of persons and places that Widsith has visi Among others, he visited Hermanric, king of the Go and received hospitable treatment at his hands. H Hermanric, the king of the Ostrogoths, died in 3

and the first permanent settlement of the English in England was not till 449. It looks, therefore, as if we had in Widsith's song a relic of continental English literature. The introductory lines above referred to are consistent with this view, for, in giving a brief account of Widsith, before the actual unlocking of his "word-hoard," they say that he "was born among the Myrgings, and for his first journey sought the home of the fierce king Hermanric, to the east of Ongle." It is hard to say who the Myrgings were, but "Ongle" seems to be Anglia, and may well designate the original home of the Angles.

There are, however, difficulties about this explanation. Widsith mentions a certain Theodoric, king of the Franks, who did not succeed to the throne till 511. It is obviously impossible that the same person could visit Hermanric and mention Theodoric, and we therefore see that the story of Widsith either is fictitious or has suffered from late interpolations.

The latter alternative is easy to accept. The professional poets of the early English were wandering minstrels, who played their harps and chanted their poems in the halls of their entertainers. Their songs were sometimes original, sometimes learned from others. If we assume that Widsith was a real poet, who achieved fame before the English came to England; that the introductory lines of the extant poem are merely a setting given to one of his songs by a later poet who revered his memory; and that in oral transmission for many generations, while the real spirit of the song was preserved, it became confused in matters of detail; if

we assume all this, we assume what we cannot prove, but all is well within the limits of probability. We may at least feel reasonably certain that the nucleus of Widsith's song is older than the invasion of England; that it is indeed one of the oldest, and perhaps the very oldest, of extant specimens of English literature.

The poem itself contains evidence of the mode of life of the poet. The introduction tells us that Widsith was the greatest of travelers, and that "he often received valuable gifts in the hall;" and the body of the poem says, "I was among the Burgundians, where I received a bracelet; there Guthere gave me welcome treasure to reward my song; no careless king was he." The concluding sentiment comes appropriately from the lips of such a man:

> Thus poets wander over the world,
> With songs of grief or grateful praises;
> And some they see in south or north,
> Lovers of song, largesse-givers,
> Who are willing to win the highest praise
> Above their peers, until all things pass,
> Life and light together: they who love renown
> Have under heaven the highest glory.

**18. Beowulf.** — The most important monument of Old English literature is *Beowulf*, an epic poem of 3183 lines. This, like *Widsith*, exists in only one manuscript, and our knowledge of its origin and history must be obtained from internal evidence. The manuscript appears to have been written early in the tenth century.

The poem itself is certainly much older than that, but it is not possible to fix its age exactly.

Beowulf is the name of the hero, and the epic contains an account of two periods in his life. The first part deals with his fight with a strange monster, Grendel. This creature had been for many years preying upon the warriors of the good king Hrothgar, entering his hall by night and dragging them away to be devoured in the wilderness. Beowulf comes from over the sea, undertakes to sleep in the hall, and when Grendel enters grapples with him. Weapons are useless against the monster, but Beowulf in the fight tears off his arm, and Grendel rushes away to die. After rejoicing and thanksgiving, Grendel's mother appears seeking vengeance, and Beowulf's heroism, again put to the proof, is again triumphant. The latter part of the poem deals with Beowulf in his old age, after he has become king in his own land across the sea. A fiery dragon is ravaging the land, and the aged warrior seeks him in his lair. He kills the dragon, but is himself fatally hurt.

The latter part of the poem is supposed to be based upon a solar myth; in other words, it is thought that the fight with the dragon represents the struggle of the summer's warmth with the winter's storms, showing how summer wins a victory for the moment, but eventually passes away. Myths of this character are certainly common among primitive peoples, and perhaps they are based upon natural phenomena; but however that may be, it seems likely that there is some foundation in fact for the story of Beowulf. The most generally accepted

theory is that the hero was a real person, and that the epic is founded upon his actual deeds. Tradition, of course, greatly exaggerated those deeds; and perhaps the exaggerated tales about Beowulf, the slayer of monsters, became somehow confused in the minds of our forefathers with the old allegorical tale about winter and summer. Theories of this kind, however, must be received with caution. Scholars sometimes undervalue the inventive imagination of our early story-tellers, in their eagerness to explain literary phenomēna.

It is impossible to determine where or when the poem was composed. It is puzzling to find that Hrothgar's home, the scene of the first part, is apparently in Denmark, and that Beowulf's own kingdom is in Sweden. There is no mention of England, or the Angles, or the Saxons. On the other hand, the epic exists only in English, and occasional allusions to the Christian religion show that it cannot have taken its present form before the seventh century. By that time the English were well established in England, and would naturally have lost all interest in places so foreign as Denmark and Sweden. It is clear that these religious allusions must be later interpolations. Perhaps the most plausible theory is that the story existed among the English in the form of several short poems when they were still on the continent, near neighbors of the Danes and Swedes; and that those stories, brought to England by men of Widsith's profession, were pieced together at some time in the eighth century by some Christian editor.

**19. Beowulf (continued).** — Old English verse sounds to our ears decidedly uncouth. Poetry was written in lines

ı four accented syllables, and a varying number of
ɜrs. Thus *Beowulf* begins:

Hwaet! wē Gār-Dena in gēar-dagum
ðēod-cyninga ðrym gefrūnon,

ch may be imitated in Modern English as follows:

Ho! of the Danes in days of yore
The proud princes we have heard the praises.

ɜ of the first two accented syllables always begins
ı the same sound as one of the last two. This allit-
ion is often found in three of the syllables, and some-
es in all four. Modern scholars have found laws
ch regulate the number and position of the unac-
ted syllables also, but to an unlearned reader they
ɛ as if they were allowed to come in at random,
ɜrever it was convenient. The verse, therefore, often
s not seem rhythmical at all, and a hasty judgment
ıld be that our forefathers had no ear for poetry; but
very fact that these matters are regulated by laws,
l that those laws are somewhat complicated and hard
us to grasp, shows that the early English really did
oy and appreciate their verse in a way in which we
selves are unable to follow them. It is not impossi-
that with the change in our language we have lost
ıe part of the language faculty, somewhat as modern
es in general have lost the classical sense for quan-
ɾ; but it seems more likely that the Old English
ɨts fitted their verse somehow to their harp music,
l it is perhaps because we know so little about their
sic that we are unable fully to understand how their
se appealed to them.

Old English poetry was often formless, inartistic in general structure. The story of *Beowulf*, as a story, is not very well told. There are confusing digressions, and due proportion is not always observed between the important and the unimportant. Everything is rough-hewn. The poets were fond of using unfamiliar words and strange, heavy phrases, and the lumbering movement of their verse is thereby made (for our ears) still more awkward. Thus the introductory lines of Beowulf, describing an ancestor of Hrothgar, say:

> He waxed under welkin, throve with worship,
> Until each singly of the near-sitters
> Over the whale-path had to hearken
> And give tribute; a good king was he.

The "near-sitters over the whale-path" are "neighbors over the sea."

The earliest poets were perhaps at their best in certain kinds of description. Here is a part of the account of the abode of Grendel and his mother, freely paraphrased:

> They dwell in a wilderness by wolves haunted,
> Where the fen-path winds by windy headlands
> And the mountain waterfall is mist-shrouded.
> Not many miles hence the mere standeth.
> There in hoary whiteness forests overhang,
> Leaning over the water with roots interlocked,
> And fires are flaming horridly on the flood,
> A nightly wonder. No man so wise
> Of the sons of our fathers as to fathom that depth.
> The hound-driven hart will not hide his head there,
> But yields life and breath, exhausted, on the brink.

The poet was evidently at home in the description of wild scenery. Sometimes he is merely sensational, but often his verses have a grandeur and a gloom that are legitimately thrilling. The sea was his favorite element, — not the smooth, sunshiny surface, but the thundering, storm-swept deeps, peopled with strange horrors. The blood of the Vikings is in his poetry.

The ruling sentiments of the poet or poets of *Beowulf* seem to be that glory and honor are the highest good possible to man, but that Wyrd (Fate) is the supreme arbiter of our destinies, and that we cannot control them. When Beowulf goes to meet the dragon in his last fight, he says, "I will not flee one foot before him; yet it shall be decided between us as Wyrd shall allot, the supreme god of every man." This is not an oriental fatalism; there is no passive recumbency about it; yet its spirit is far from the spirit of Christianity, and it is clear that the final editor of *Beowulf*, while he added Christian touches here and there, did not attempt to root out the essential paganism of his original. There is a high moral spirit in the poem, but the morals are those of the pagan warrior hero, not of the cloister.

One other characteristic picture in the epic must be noted. The fight with Grendel's mother took place at the bottom of the horrid pool already described. Beowulf had said farewell to his friends on the bank and plunged in. With grotesque exaggeration we are told that it took him nearly a whole day to sink to the bottom, and many hours more were consumed before he won the victory and swam up to the surface. Meanwhile his friends, both the Danes with Hrothgar and

Beowulf's own companions from over the sea, gave l up for lost.

> The noon-day came, they quitted the cliff,
> The hasty Danes, and Hrothgar homeward
> Started with them: but the strangers sat
> And gazed heart-sick at the gloomy mere,
> Wishing (not weening) ever to win
> Their dear lord back.

Here we see that with all the gloom and fiercer there is yet room for softer feeling now and tl Tennyson's prince might well have had the spirit *Beowulf* in mind when he sang "dark and true tender is the north." [1]

**20. Cædmon and Bede.** — The earliest English po by a known author is Cædmon's, and the earliest p was Bede's. Cædmon died at an advanced age in Bede being at the time in his boyhood. This wa the time of the Northumbrian kingdom's supremacy, both these writers were Northumbrians. That king stood at the head of the Heptarchy in literature learning, as well as in political and military power.

Cædmon's poetry is nearly all lost, but we know character from Bede's account of it in his *Ecclesias History*, and there are still in existence a few ve which are thought to have opened Cædmon's poem. They are substantially as follows:

> Now let us hallow the heaven's warder,
> The Maker's might and the thoughts of his mind,
> The World-father's work, how of all wonders
> The God of Glory made a beginning.

[1] Compare Stopford Brooke, *English Literature*, p. 18.

Cædmon's muse was wholly devoted to religion. He composed metrical paraphrases of the scriptural accounts of the Creation, the Exodus, the life of Christ, and the teaching of the apostles. Poems of this general character are still extant, and two in particular, known as the *Genesis* and the *Exodus*, were until recently thought to be Cædmon's; but careful study has shown that different parts of these poems must have been written by different authors, and that very little of them could possibly have been written by Cædmon.

Thus it appears that after the English became thoroughly established in England, there was a sweeping change in the spirit of their literature. This was of course due to the introduction of Christianity, but more especially to the introduction of monastic institutions. The time of Cædmon and Bede was just the time when the monastic system was most flourishing and pure. This was the case everywhere, but perhaps especially in England. Many monasteries were founded there in the seventh century. As this work was done largely by Celtic missionaries from Ireland, it is interesting to note that much of the new character in English literature and life may reasonably be regarded as springing from the seed sown two centuries before by St. Patrick.

In the turbulent dark ages, the monastery was the only place where those who loved peace and learning could find congenial surroundings. The ideal of the monastic system was plain living and high thinking, and at this period the ideal was actually realized. In the daily routine of monkish labor and devotion there was a

refined tranquillity not to be found beyond the mon tery walls. The monks collected and copied ma scripts, wrote the annals of their own societies or of t outside world, studied and practiced music, the deco tive arts, medicine, agriculture, architecture; they w missionaries to the secular world not only of relig but also of the arts and the practical sciences. M bers of different institutions visited one another, thus between parts of England, and between Engl and the continent, there was a free and friendly excha of spiritual and intellectual food. The best youth the time were irresistibly attracted to this life, and t the highest culture and the deepest religion of the ti were blended together. No wonder that in literat the Beowulfian ideal of pagan heroism dwindled so what before the scriptural ideal of Christian piety.

Cædmon was a servant in the monastery at Whit Bede was a monk at Jarrow. Bede was the grea scholar of his time, and his reputation as such world-wide. He was esteemed as master of all learn and scholars came from remote parts of the contin to be taught by him. He wrote of music, rhet theology, mathematics, and the applied sciences; in general his works hardly belong to English literat The monkish language all over the western world Latin, and in that language nearly all Bede's w were written. The chief of these is the *Ecclesiast History of Britain*, the source of our knowledge of C mon, and of much of the history of the English peo One of Bede's latest works, however, a translatior part of the Gospel of St. John, was written in Eng

for the use of the less learned; and because of this work Bede is sometimes called the "father of English prose." The work, however, is no longer extant, and the title is of questionable propriety.

**21. Cynewulf.** — In the year 1822 a German scholar, traveling in Italy, discovered in a monastery at Vercelli a manuscript volume of Old English sermons and poems. How it came there is unknown; but there is nothing extraordinary about it, for Vercelli was a common resting place for English pilgrims on the way to Rome. This volume (commonly known as the Vercelli Book), and the Exeter Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscript, and a manuscript of the *Genesis* and the *Exodus*, contain nearly all that remains of Old English poetry.

Perhaps the best poem in the Vercelli Book is that known as the *Elene*, which describes the finding of the true cross by the Empress Helena. The poem begins by telling that the Emperor Constantine, on the eve of a battle with the Huns and Goths, had a vision of a jeweled cross above the clouds, inscribed with the words, "By this sign shalt thou overcome the foe." The battle was fought and won, and then Constantine, learning for the first time what the cross was, sent his mother, Helena, to the Holy Land to seek the true original of the symbol. The true cross and the two crosses of the thieves were, by miraculous guidance, found side by side. All three were tested by touching a dead body with each in turn, and when at the third trial the corpse was brought to life, the empress knew that her search was ended.

Near the end of the *Elene* the poet gives his own

name in a sort of riddling acrostic. He does this by the use of certain runes, or letters of the prehistoric alphabet of the English people. These letters were called by the names of things, each name beginning with the sound designated by the corresponding rune; as if, for example, we called the letter "a" *apricot*, the letter "b" *bagpipe*, etc. In the passage referred to, this poet simply inserts in his poem eight of these runes, at intervals, instead of spelling out the words which are their names. He is giving an account of himself, and he says that even in his prosperous days he was like a failing torch (Cen), and that the fall (Yr) [1] of his friends brought him to sorrow (Nied); and so on in like manner until we have spelled out the whole name CYNEWULF.

The poem is certainly one of great merit, and it is interesting to have even such scanty knowledge of the author and his life as he has chosen to give us. He says that in his youth he received rich gifts in the hall of his patron; but sorrow and perhaps poverty came upon him, and his heart was turned from the frivolities of fashion and sport to the religious life. Accordingly in his old age he dedicates his poetic powers to the composition of religious poetry. This is the whole substance of Cynewulf's autobiography, but there are two other long poems on sacred themes which give his name in the same riddling way, and we therefore know that they were written by the same man. As Cynewulf says in the *Elene* that he received gifts in his

[1] The names of some of the runes are uncertain, and consequently the precise significance of parts of this passage is disputed. The interpretation here adopted is given only for the sake of illustration.

youth, some scholars have thought that he was a minstrel, and that it might be possible to identify some of the secular poems which he wrote before his conversion. Their efforts have not been attended by much success. The most important work which has in this way been ascribed to Cynewulf's youth is a collection of riddles in the Exeter Book, but the evidence connecting these with him seems very shadowy; indeed it is probable that the gifts which Cynewulf says he received were given him for his services as a warrior, not as a poet. There is enough, however, in both quantity and merit, of the unquestionably genuine work of Cynewulf to assure him the distinction of being the best of the Old English poets of whose personality we have any knowledge. From linguistic evidence it appears that he lived about the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth, and it is pretty clear that he was an inhabitant of the kingdom of Mercia. This was the southernmost of the two great Anglian kingdoms in the Heptarchy, and it enjoyed a brief period of overlordship between the supremacy of Northumberland and that of Wessex. It seems, therefore, that in Mercia, as in Northumberland, political and literary greatness went nearly hand in hand.

The religious fervor of Cynewulf's poetry is unquestionable, but the inherited English love of fighting, either with men or with the elements, is perhaps more marked. One of the best passages in the *Elene* is the account of the empress's voyage. There the description of the swelling of the sails and the buffeting of the waves shows that Christianized England had not yet forgotten

its pagan instincts. A curious illustration of this is a passage near the beginning descriptive of the battle. Cynewulf's model, a Latin version of the story, barely states the fact of the victory, but the English poet's expansion of the theme shows that to him this was the most congenial of topics. Here is a sentence from the original:

> And he fell upon the barbarians with his army, and began slaughtering them at the break of day; and the barbarians were panic-stricken, and took to flight along the banks of the Danube, and a considerable multitude of them died.

The following is a free paraphrase of the corresponding passage in Cynewulf:

> Trumpets resounded before the troop.
> The raven was watching and waiting joyfully,
> The dewy-winged eagle saw from the distance,
> And the wolf from his haunt in the desolate wood
> Howled at the terror of death and hate.
> Arrows rained on them as they rushed together;
> Shields were broken, javelins shattered,
> And the sword that swayed with the swinging arm
> Came crashing down on the death-doomed foe.
> They pressed on resolutely, pushing with effort,
> Thrusting with swords and swinging battle-axes,
> And ever their banner was borne forward
> With shouts of triumph that were loud and shrill,
> As the heathen fell joyless on that field.
> Hastily the host of Huns fled away
> When the Roman king, the fighter unconquerable,
> The fierce leader, lifted the cross.
> Wide was the ruin that was wrought on the heathen.
> Some perished there in that place of death,

Some fled half alive to rocky fastnesses,
And won their way back to Danube's banks;
And some found death in the depths of the lake-stream.
But the proud victors chased the vanquished
From the day's dawning till night came down,
And with ash-darts and arrows, (fierce battle-adders),
They destroyed the hateful host of the enemy.

**22. Judith.** — In the same manuscript which contains *Beowulf*, there is found a fragment, in 350 lines, of a poem based on the apocryphal Book of Judith. It tells, with some departures from the original narrative, how the Hebrew maiden cut off the head of Nebuchadnezzar's general, Holofernes, while he was in a drunken sleep, and then aroused the Israelites to attack and rout the Assyrian army. The religious spirit is dominant in the piece, sometimes running to absurdity, as where the Jewess is made to pray to the Saviour and to the Holy Trinity; but there is also present a martial spirit which, as in the *Elene*, reminds us quite as much of paganism as of Christianity. The poet exults in the deed of Judith and in those of her warrior compatriots, not merely with religious fervor but also, it seems, with a half barbaric delight in battle for its own sake. The Almighty is not only God of Mercy, but also "God of Hosts," "Dispenser of Glory," "Splendor of Kings." This same mixed character, indeed, is found in a great deal of the religious poetry of the early English. It should be remembered that even *Beowulf*, in which the paganism is almost undiluted, was perhaps written, and pretty certainly rewritten, long after the monkish period began. Whatever may have been the spirit within the

monastery walls, outsiders were not completely won over to the Gospel of Peace.

Inasmuch as different dialects were spoken in different parts of England, and as all the dialects were suffering continuous change and development, it would seem that scholars should always be able to tell, by linguistic evidence, where and when a particular book was written. The difficulty of doing this, however, is very great. In the first place, when a southern monk or other scribe copied a northern work, he would modify its language according to his own standard of correctness. When, therefore, we have an anonymous work existing in only a single manuscript, it is next to impossible to say in what dialect it was originally written. It will be remembered that Wessex was the last of the kingdoms to be supreme in the Heptarchy. Now this supremacy, as in the case of Northumberland and Mercia, was in literature and learning as well as in political power. Northern learning disappeared before the encroachments of the Danes, and we have very little left of the northern literature except what the literary men of the later period saw fit to copy and preserve. Consequently the great bulk of Old English literature, whatever its original form, is preserved to us only in the West Saxon dress.

The date and origin of the *Judith* are utterly unknown. One of the most eminent of Old English scholars thinks it was by a Northumbrian poet of about Bede's time; another thinks it was written more than a century later in Wessex. The latter hypothesis is supported by the fact that there was a Judith who was the consort of a West Saxon king, Ælfred the Great's father. It is a

plausible conjecture that the poem is a tribute to her, and that its jubilant account of the rout of the Assyrians is an indirect celebration of some great victory over the Danes. This conjecture, however, seems incapable of proof.

**23. Ælfred and the Later Literature.** — The title "Father of English prose" is more justly given to King Ælfred than to Bede. Bede's translation of St. John is lost, while voluminous works of Ælfred are still extant. In his literary work, as well as in his political and military rule, Ælfred justifies the name of "the Great." Not that he was in the ordinary sense a great writer; but we find that with a wisdom beyond his generation he labored for the education and moral guidance of his subjects, as well as for their material prosperity. One of the evils of the monastic system was that it tended to confine literature to the Latin language, and so, while advancing the cause of learning, did little to extend it outside of a select circle. Ælfred was in full sympathy with the highest interests of the monks, and gave them valuable assistance and protection; but he also earnestly desired that the best thought of the time should be brought within reach of the unlearned. To this end he translated into English several standard works on history, science, and philosophy; and he saw to it that other work of the sort was done by other hands.

Among the works translated by Ælfred were the *Historia adversus Paganos* of Orosius, a Spaniard; the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Bede, the Englishman; and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, a Roman. The last-named is the most celebrated of the books that

Ælfred translated. The original was written in the sixth century by one who is sometimes called "the last of the Romans." The book was the last important work of genius produced by pagan Rome. It is said to have been written in prison, where Boethius was confined on account of political animosities. It is as purely pagan a work as the *De Senectute;* though in another and looser sense it may be called, like Cicero's treatise, fairly Christian in spirit. Its posthumous history was remarkable, for throughout the middle ages it was regarded as a manual of religious philosophy, and its author was supposed to have been a devout Christian. It was frequently translated, and was in high repute as late as the seventeenth century.

Ælfred's labors were a lasting benefit to England. The most prosperous period of Old English history was in the century following his death, and the literature of that period is abundant. The literary traditions of Wessex, dating from Ælfred's time, survived till the Norman Conquest, though sometimes interrupted by the later Danish wars. The literature of this period was mostly of a religious tenor, and it indicates that England under the West Saxon kings was a civilized country in which the best men's standards of morality were like our own. Their literary art seems of an inferior order when we compare it with the best product of modern times; but indeed literary art was not what they were seeking especially to cultivate. Sermons were written, and lives of saints, and school books, and (most important of all) the *English Chronicle,* a record of contemporary events, begun before Ælfred's reign and continued

from time to time by a long series of writers down to the year 1154. Some parts of this work are very prosy annals, but others are real literature, and occasionally the anonymous chronicler breaks into verse. One passage of poetry celebrating the victory at Brunanburh in 937 has all the spirit and fire of the Viking days. Tennyson was sufficiently interested to translate it, and the merits of his *Battle of Brunanburh* are substantially those of the original.

The *English Chronicle* nearly bridges the gap between the Old and the Middle English literatures. The most barren period in our whole literary history was the century and a half following the Norman Conquest. Most of the high places in both church and state were occupied by Normans. The common monk and the parish priest were perhaps English, but their abbot and bishop spoke French. There are shocking stories in the *Chronicle* of the oppression of the subject race — stories of torture, starvation, robbery, and enslavement. The history of the English during this period was of course not wholly one of misery, but there was enough of it in their lot to prevent the growth of anything that can fairly be called literature. Whatever was written for the entertainment of the ruling classes was written in French, and some of the best French literature of the twelfth century was produced on English soil. Treatises addressed primarily to the learned were written in Latin. Those who wrote English did so either because they could write nothing else, or because those whom they wished to reach could read nothing else; and nearly all that has come down to us from this period is of a religious and didactic character.

Doubtless there were other kinds of work done. The wandering minstrel continued to go his rounds, and a great deal of secular poetry may have been composed by him, if not by others also; but this kind of verse had little chance of preservation. In the first place, it was likely not to be written down at all, for there was little advantage in writing it; and in the second place, while the monasteries were not the only places where poetry was composed, they were the places where manuscripts were most likely to be cared for. Whatever the inmates of a monastery or other clerical institution thought fit to copy and keep in their library had a slight chance of surviving the middle ages; other things had in general no chance at all. Furthermore, we know of instances of the wanton destruction of Old English manuscripts by Norman monks. They could not read them, and by erasing the words they could make the parchments available for their own use. It is clear, therefore, that our knowledge of the Old English literature in general must be very defective; but that we know even less of the secular literature than of the religious.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ROMANCES OF CHIVALRY

**24. Asceticism.** — The period of mediæval romance extends from the eleventh well into the fifteenth century, but romances written in the latter part of this period were mere survivals of an almost extinct fashion. It will be most convenient, therefore, to consider this whole species of literature in a single chapter, and to return afterwards to the strict chronological order of our history. As, however, the romance of chivalry was the product of a peculiar state of society, it will be necessary to consider incidentally some aspects of mediæval life; and the ascetic element in mediæval religion may conveniently be considered in advance.

Self-denial was the first rule of the monastic orders, and a prominent feature of mediæval religious observance in general. Asceticism was, however, by no means a peculiarly mediæval institution. Sects of heathen philosophers, many centuries before the time of Christ, had advocated various forms of self-denial, such as celibacy, total abstinence, etc.; and the same sort of teaching is found in some of the later Jewish scriptures. There was in general, however, this difference between the pagan and the Christian ascetics; that the former advocated self-denial for ethical, the latter for religious, purposes. The Greek philosophers thought that by thwarting the

natural promptings of the flesh they could attain to perfect virtue; the recluse of the monastic period turned a deaf ear to the voices of the flesh and the world in order to hear more distinctly the voice of God speaking within his own soul. Many a holy man, after wasting his body with fasting and pain, had half-feverish visions of the other world, and felt himself inspired to utter prophecies and to perform miracles. Many of the saints of the church had experiences of this sort, and their lives swell the literature of the middle ages.

An excellent illustration of mediæval asceticism is found in the legendary *Life of St. Alexis*. This work must have been very popular throughout the later middle ages, for it is still extant in several languages, and in versions dating from the eleventh century on. One manuscript gives the story (in fourteenth-century English) substantially as follows:

Sit still and I will tell you the story of a holy man: Alexis was his name. His father was Eufemian, a great and good lord in Rome. This lord and his pious wife used to give generously to the poor, never sitting down to their own food till all who came to their door for charity had first been satisfied. For a long time this pair were childless, but at length a son, Alexis, was sent them in response to their prayers. He grew up holy and wise, and dear to all hearts. His parents arranged a most advantageous marriage for him, but Alexis was so wholly given to religion that he regarded the happiness of wedded life with horror. Immediately after the ceremony, therefore, he fled from home alone, without giving any intimation as to where he was going. Coming at length to a city in Syria, he gave away all his money and the best of his attire, and sat

down at a church door in common beggar's garb, resolved to live on the alms of casual givers. Every one supposed him to be an ordinary mendicant.

Meantime the parents and the wife of Alexis were in the depths of grief. His mother said "Alas, alas!", and his wife made moan like a dove that has lost her mate. They sent messengers to all parts of the world to find him, and it chanced that some of these messengers came to the very place where he was. They saw him sitting in the poor men's row, but as they could not recognize him they gave him alms and passed by. He thanked God that it was permitted him to receive charity from those who had once been his inferiors, but he did not betray himself to them; and so they returned to the bereaved family and reported that Alexis could not be found. He, meanwhile, remained at his post by the church door in the Syrian city, humbly rejoicing in his own sufferings.

After this manner of life had continued for seventeen years, an image of the Virgin, which stood inside the church, spoke to the church-warden and commanded him to bring inside the holy man who had sat so long at the door. Alexis accordingly was brought to live inside the edifice, and great honor was shown him because of his long life of poverty. His holy nature, however, would not permit him to be the recipient of such attentions (even at the miraculous bidding of the sacred image), so he fled again in search of a land where he might pursue his course of religious mendicancy unnoticed. Taking ship, he was driven by adverse winds to Rome, his old home. Recognizing that it was the will of God that had brought him hither, he resolved to go to his father's house; but he presented himself there not as the returned son, but still in the character of a poor beggar. His father received him, without recognizing him, and gave him a place among the recipients of his bounty; and there Alexis passed another seventeen years.

Nou Alex, as ȝe[1] habbeþ[2] i-herd,
is dweld in his fader ȝerd
as a pore man.
In preyere of fasting & waking,
he seruede Iesu, heuene kyng,
in al þat he can.
Seruantȝ þat were proute & ȝungge
him dryuen ofte to heþingge[3]
as he ȝede[4] vp & doun;
& ofte-sithes[5] broþ of ffisches,
& water as he[6] wessch here dissches,
þei caste vpon his croun.
Of al þe schame þat þei him wrouȝthe
he þonkede Iesu, þat him bouthe,[7]
& ȝaf[8] him myȝtte þerto;
he was þolemod[9] in alle þinge,
þer-out ne myȝtte no man him bringe,
ffor nowth[10] þei couden do.

When Alexis felt that death was near, he wrote a full account of his life, and then died in his humble cot, with his manuscript clasped in his hand. A voice from heaven bade the people seek the holy man in Eufemian's house, and the Emperor, the Pope, and a great crowd of others came to the place where Alexis lay dead. Several persons tried to take the manuscript, but the dead hand would not let go till the Pope himself made the attempt. Then it

[1] The character ȝ has three uses. At the beginning of a word it represents the sound of consonantal *y*, in the middle of a word that of a strongly aspirated *h*, or *gh*, and at the end that of *s* or *z*. Thus ȝe is equivalent to ye, wrouȝthe to wrought, and seruantȝ to servants. The initial ȝ is really a softened g. The Old English form for ȝe was ge; for ȝede, ge-eode, etc.

[2] The character þ represents the sound of *th*, and is used in some manuscripts interchangeably with ð.

[3] mockery. [4] went. [5] oftentimes. [6] they. [7] bought. [8] gave. [9] meek. [10] aught.

readily relinquished it. The beggar's identity was established. The parents and the widow (faithful for thirty-four years) made bitter lamentation, but all marveled at the extraordinary holiness of the deceased. Whoever touched the body, whether sick, halt, or blind, was straightway made whole. A tomb of gold and precious stones was reared, and pilgrims thronged to the place forever after, for the sake of the miraculous cures wrought there.

To a certain extent the ascetic mind found compensation for its renunciation of earthly pleasures in a peculiarly impassioned religious mysticism. The anchoress, in her solitary cell, had visions of the heavenly Bridegroom, whose spiritual visitations instilled in her soul a love deeper than that of the flesh, which she had abjured. The monk, in addressing hymns of fervent adoration to the Virgin, appeased a craving for which the worship of the Holy Trinity could not suffice.

O quam sancta, quam serena,
quam benigna, quam amoena,
esse virgo creditur:
per quam servitus finitur,
porta coeli aperitur,
et libertas redditur.

Scores of hymns of this character have come down to us from the middle ages. Many of them are mere exercises in ingenious phrase-turning, but some show real warmth of feeling; and wherever this is present, it may fairly be regarded as a sort of by-product of asceticism.

**25. Geoffrey and the French Romances.** — In the early part of the twelfth century long narrative poems were very common in French literature. They told of the

chivalrous deeds of brave knights, and their heroes were usually borrowed from legends either of the Trojan war, or of the wars of Alexander the Great, or of the court of Charlemagne. It was the development of the feudal system that first made these romances the fashion. Under the centrifugal operation of this system, already described, there came into being in France a large class of wealthy and powerful barons who, with their vassal knights, lived in comparative isolation and independence. The romances of chivalry presented a poetic and highly idealized picture of the kind of life that these men led. Hector, Alexander, Charlemagne, and their friends and their foes, were represented as knights of the era of feudalism, performing impossible tasks with superhuman valor.

About the year 1140 Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote in Latin his celebrated History of the Britons (*Historia Britonum*). This was an almost wholly mythical account of the early Celtic inhabitants of Britain. It began with Brut, a great-grandson of Æneas, the supposed founder of the supposed British kingdom, and ran through the almost interminable line of his fabulous descendants. Among these were many who have since become well known to literature, such as Cymbeline and Lear; but the greatest figure of all was King Arthur. The precise sources from which Geoffrey drew his stories of Arthur are still partly in dispute, but he must have been partly indebted to traditions picked up among his Welsh neighbors. They still cherished the memory of the great sixth-century hero.

As soon as Geoffrey's book was known, Arthur became

the favorite hero not of the Welsh only, nor indeed of the Celts, but of all literary Europe. His character, as the Celtic imagination had devised it, was in some respects better suited to the romancer's needs than any of the heroes already familiar; and the latter, moreover, were getting worn out. So it came about that romances in prose and verse, celebrating the deeds of Arthur and his mythical knights, were composed without number. The first work was done in French, and therefore in one sense does not belong to the history of our literature; but the later English romances were imitations of the French, and the joint history of romance in the two languages is best regarded as one subject.

The most illustrious of the French Arthurian poets was Chrestien of Troyes. One of his romances, the *Conte de la Charrette* (Tale of the Car), written about 1170, demands attention as the first example of a peculiar sort of love story which afterwards became very common. The essentials of the tale are as follows:

Guinevere, King Arthur's queen, was taken captive by the fierce Meliagraunce, a treacherous knight who lived in a distant castle. Lancelot, who was the king's most gallant knight, but also secretly the lover of his queen, rode furiously in pursuit. Losing his horse, he was offered a car to ride in; but the car was of the kind used for the meanest of criminals — a sort of movable stocks. Lancelot hesitated for just one second, but then accepted the conveyance. After a series of extraordinary adventures he reached the castle and fought with Meliagraunce. Lancelot was getting the worst of the combat, owing to fatigue and wounds previously received, when a maiden called his attention to Guinevere in a window, hoping thus to cheer

him to renewed effort. The effect was not what she expected, for Lancelot was unable to keep his eyes on his enemy, and so struck wildly; but the maiden told him to stand with Meliagraunce between himself and the window, so that he might watch him and Guinevere at the same time, and by this device he was able to win the victory. After the combat he found Guinevere in the castle, but she turned her back abruptly and left the room. Lancelot languished in despair, ignorant of the cause of his lady's displeasure, but knowing that he must have been guilty of some heinous fault. A report spread that he had died, and Guinevere gave herself up to secret sorrow, resolving to starve to death. Lancelot appeared again, and Guinevere this time deigned to explain her ill-treatment of him. She had heard that when the car was offered to him he had hesitated for a second, weighing the indignity for that length of time against the pain of losing her. Lancelot most humbly admitted the grievousness of his fault, and prayed for forgiveness, which the queen was graciously pleased to grant.

This story is in many ways a typical illustration of the romance of chivalry, and the sentiments implied in it should be carefully noted. In the first place, love, which offers the central interest in poems of this class, is of the furtive, forbidden sort. The love of husband and wife, or even of persons who might just as well become husband and wife, was no theme for a poet of this school. Such love was not love at all, as he understood it. True love requires that the lover should be always in doubt of his success, or in fear of his lady's withdrawal of favor; and calm marital possession would of course make this impossible. The lover must always be in a trembling, timorous attitude before his lady; he is literally her

servant, as he is often called, and she is all whim and caprice. In addition to the love story, these romances of course abound in exciting adventures, but the lover's gallant deeds are all for love. His heart is set on proving by his prowess that he is worthy of love's rewards. The very word "gallantry" shows how inextricably blent were the ideas of love and valor; for the two senses which it now bears were in the middle ages felt as one.

**26. The Holy Grail.** — Not long after Chrestien had elaborated his extraordinary tissue of fancy, some of his younger contemporaries[1] took up the Arthurian legend and gave it a very different turn. Who they were it is impossible to say, for as to the authorship of many of these romances evidence is either conflicting or wholly wanting. The change wrought in the spirit of the Arthur legend was the introduction of a moral element, and this was done by the invention of a new episode, the Quest of the Holy Grail. The Grail, or Graal, was the vessel from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and in which Joseph of Arimathea received some of the sacred blood at the crucifixion. Joseph brought it with him, according to an old church legend, to Britain, and there it was kept for a long time; but it was finally lost, and none had been able to find it. Now it occurred to some of the early romancers that this legend might well be connected with the court of King Arthur, and this was done by representing the knights of his celebrated Round Table as uniting in a vow to search for the Grail until it should be found again. The following extracts from

[1] The innovation is often credited to Walter Map, who was a few years older than Chrestien.

Malory's fifteenth-century version of the story will illustrate the trend of the new idea. His account is based upon the earlier French romances, and is better than any literal translation could be.

And thenne the kynge and al estates wente home unto Camelot, and soo wente to evensonge to the grete mynster; and soo after upon that to souper, and every knyght sette in his owne place as they were to fore hand. Thenne anone they herd crakynge and cryenge of thonder that hem thought the place shold alle to dryve. In the myddes of this blast entred a sonne beaume more clerer by seven tymes than ever they sawe daye, and al they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Ghoost. Thenne beganne every knyghte to behold other, and eyther sawe other by theire semynge fayrer than ever they sawe afore. Not for thenne there was no knyght myghte speke one word a grete whyle, and soo they loked every man on other, as they had ben dome. Thenne ther entred in to the halle the Holy Graile coverd with whyte samyte, but ther was none myghte see hit, nor who bare hit. And there was al the halle fulfylled with good odoures, and every knyght had suche metes and drynkes as he best loved in this world. And whan the Holy Grayle had be borne thurgh the halle, thenne the holy vessel departed sodenly, that they wyste not where hit becam. Thenne had they alle brethe to speke; and thenne the kynge yelded thankynges to God of his good grace that he had sente them. "Certes," said the kynge, "we oughte to thanke oure Lord Jhesu gretely for that he hath shewed us this daye atte reverence of this hyhe feest of Pentecost." "Now," said Sir Gawayn, "we have ben served this daye of what metes and drynkes we thoughte on, but one thynge begyled us; we myght not see the Holy Grayle, it was soo precyously coverd: wherfor I wil make here avowe, that to morne, withoute lenger

abydyng, I shall laboure in the quest of the Sancgreal; that I shalle hold me oute a twelve moneth and a day or more yf nede be, and never shalle I retorne ageyne unto the courte tyl I have sene hit more openly than hit hath ben sene here. And yf I may not spede, I shall retorne ageyne as he that maye not be ageynst the wil of our Lord Jhesu Cryste." Whan they of the Table Round herde Syr Gawayne saye so, they arose up the most party and maade suche avowes as Sire Gawayne had made.

Some of the knights succeeded in the quest, and some failed, each faring according to his deserts; but Lancelot, the brave knight, false friend, and faithful lover, both succeeded and failed. Coming to a strange castle he heard a voice telling him to enter, and he should see a great part of his desire; so he entered and found within a chamber whereof the door was shut and locked.

Thenne he lystned, and herd a voyce whiche sange so swetely that it semed none erthely thynge; and hym thoughte the voyce said, "Joye and honour be to the Fader of Heven." Thenne Lancelot kneled doun to fore the chamber, for wel wyst he that there was the Sancgreal within that chamber. Thenne sayd he, "Fair swete Fader Jhesu Cryst, yf ever I dyd thyng that pleasyd the Lord, for thy pyte ne have me not in despyte for my synnes done afore tyme, and that thou shewe me some thynge of that I seke." And with that he sawe the chamber dore open, and there came oute a grete clerenes, that the hows was as bryghte as all the torches of the world had ben there. So cam he to the chamber dore, and wold have entryd. And anone a voyce said to hym, "Flee, Launcelot, and entre not, for thou oughtest not to doo hit; and yf thou entre thou shalt forthynke hit." Thenne he withdrewe hym abak ryght hevy. Thenne loked he up in the myddes of the

chamber, and sawe a table of sylver, and the holy vessel coverd with reed samyte, and many angels aboute hit, wherof one helde a candel of waxe brennyng, and the other held a crosse and the ornementys of an aulter. . . . Ryghte soo entryd he in to the chamber, and cam toward the table of sylver, and whanne he came nyghe he felte a brethe that hym thoughte hit was entremedled with fyre, whiche smote hym so sore in the vysage that hym thoughte it brente his vysage; and there with he felle to the erthe, and had no power to aryse, as he that was soo araged that had loste the power of his body, and his herynge, and his seynge. Thenne felte he many handes aboute him, whiche tooke hym up and bare hym oute of the chamber dore, withoute ony amendynge of his swoune, and lefte hym there semyng dede to al peple.

From the two kinds of specimens which have been given, it is clear that the nature of the mediæval romance was very complex. It cannot be described in a single phrase. We sometimes think of "the age of chivalry" as a time when the weaker sex was especially revered by the stronger, and pure love was the chief incentive of noble ambition; but such romances as the *Conte de la Charrette* reveal a notion of love not merely artificial to the verge of absurdity, but at bottom profoundly immoral. On the other hand, it will not do to dismiss the whole romantic idea (as some are tempted to do) as a high-fantastical fabrication, having no relation to the soberer feelings of the time. Such a conception seems to melt away as the Grail romances are studied. The fact is that the mediæval romances were written by many different men, and though they are much alike in some of their romantic peculiarities, they exhibit very different

attitudes toward life. The artificial fashion of chivalrous love was introduced by men whose immediate ambition was to be read by "society." Now in the twelfth century, society, in our sense of the word, was just beginning to exist. The ladies of the courts of Europe, disciples of Queen Eleanor or the Countess Marie of Champagne, were willing enough to be flattered, and a good way for Chrestien of Troyes to flatter them was by inventing a world of fiction in which the most valiant knights were as slaves at the feet of capricious ladies; but neither the poet's own instincts nor the tastes of his fair readers made it necessary that he should import into his poem a morality more rigid than that of real life. On the other hand, some of the romances were written by men of genuine religious feeling. They were probably men who belonged to the secular world, yet the ideals of the cloister had made a profound impression on them. Such a character as St. Alexis, for example, might seem to them by no means exemplary, yet they would find in him something that they could not but venerate. When they invented the character of Sir Galahad, the virgin knight whose heart was as pure as his arm was strong, and who alone succeeded in a perfect achievement of the quest, they were effecting a compromise between the ascetic ideal of the church and the common-sense ideal of the average sturdy layman; and, moreover, they were losing none of the literary possibilities of chivalry. Their work does in fact present to us, in poetical form, the highest ideal of some of the most serious men of the middle ages.

**27. Layamon and the English Romances.** — One of the French books based on Geoffrey's History was Wace's

*Brut*, a versified narrative of the same series of events. It was perhaps more from this than from the *Historia Britonum* itself that the succeeding romancers learned what Geoffrey had to tell them; but they doubtless had divers other authorities also, whom it is impossible now to identify. Wace's poem, of course, owed its name to the mythical ancestor of the British kings.

About the year 1205 an English *Brut* was written. This was the work of Layamon, a parish priest of Ernley in Worcestershire. The opening lines give us the best information we have about him. Their metre should be noted. It is a relic of the Old English verse, each half-line (or each line, as here printed) containing two principal accents, and being more or less closely connected with its fellow. The poet, however, often omitted the alliteration; and the scribe, who attempted by marks of punctuation to show which half-lines belonged together, seems in consequence to have sometimes lost his way.[1]

| | |
|---|---|
| An preost wes on leoden: | A priest was among the people |
| laȝamon wes ihoten. | Who was called Layamon. |
| he wes leouenaðes sone: | He was Levenath's son: |
| liðe him beo drihten. | Gracious to him be the Lord. |
| he wonede at ernleȝe: | He dwelt at Ernly, |
| at æðelen are chirechen. | At a noble church |
| vppen seuarne staþe: | Upon Severn's bank, |
| sel þar him þuhte. | (Well there to him it seemed), |
| on fest Radestone: | Fast by Radestone. |
| þer he bock radde. | There he read books. |
| Hit com him on mode: | It came to him in mind, |
| & on his mern þonke. | And in his chief thought, |

[1] In the manuscript all the lines are run together, like prose. The scribe's punctuation is reproduced in the following extract. Note also the equivalence of ð and þ, as, for example, in lines 4 and 48.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | þet he wolde of engle: | That he would of the English |
| | þa æðelæn tellen. | The noble lineage tell; |
| 15 | wat heo ihoten weoren: | What they were named |
| | & wonene heo comen. | And whence they came, |
| | þa englene londe: | Who English land |
| | ærest ahten. | First owned |
| | æfter þan flode: | After the flood |
| 20 | þe from drihtene com. | Which came from the Lord, |
| | þe al her aquelde: | Which quelled all here |
| | quic þat he funde. | That it found alive, |
| | buten noe & sem: | Except Noah and Shem, |
| | japhet & cham. | Japhet and Ham, |
| 25 | & heore four wiues: | And their four wives |
| | þe mid heom weren on archen. | Who with them were in the ark. |
| | laȝamon gon liðen: | Layamon began to travel |
| | wide ȝond þas leode. | Far among this people, |
| | & biwon þa æðela boc: | And obtained the noble books |
| 30 | þa he to bisne nom. | Which he for pattern took. |
| | he nom þa englisca boc: | He took the English book |
| | þa makede seint Beda. | Which Saint Bede made; |
| | an oþer he nom on latin: | Another he took in Latin, |
| | þe makede seinte albin. | Which Saint Albin made, |
| 35 | & þe feire austin: | And the fair Austin |
| | þe fulluht broute hider in. | Who brought baptism in hither. |
| | boc he nom þe þridde: | The third book he took; |
| | leide þer amidden. | Laid it there in the midst; |
| | þa makede a frenchis clerc: | Which a French scholar made; |
| 40 | wace wes ihoten: | Wace he was called. |
| | þe wel couþe writen. | He could write well, |
| | & he hoe ȝef þare æþelen: | And he gave it to the noble |
| | alienor þe wes henries quene: | Eleanor who was queen of Henry |
| | þes heȝes kinges. | The high king. |
| 45 | laȝamon leide þeos boc: | Layamon laid down these books |
| | & þa leaf wende. | And turned the leaves. |
| | he heom leofliche biheold. | He beheld them lovingly: |
| | liþe him beo drihten. | Gracious be the Lord to him. |
| | feþeren he nom mid fingren: | A pen he took with fingers, |
| 50 | & fiede on boc felle: | And wrote on book-skin, |
| | & þa soþe word: | And the true words |
| | sette to gadere. | He set together, |

| | |
|---|---|
| & þa þre boc: | And the three books |
| þrumde to are. | Compressed to one. |
| Nu biddeð laȝamon | Now prayeth Layamon |
| alcne æþele mon: | To every upright man |
| for þene almiten godd. | (For the sake of the Almighty God) |
| þet þeos boc rede: | That reads this book |
| & leornia þeos runan. | And learns this teaching, |
| þat he þeos soðfeste word: | That he these solemn words |
| segge to sumne. | Say together:— |
| for his fader saule: | For his father's soul |
| þa hine forð brouhte. | That brought him forth, |
| & for his moder saule: | And for his mother's soul |
| þa hine to monne iber. | That bore him to man, |
| & for his awene saule: | And for his own soul, |
| þat hire þe selre beo. | That with it the better it may be. |
| Amen. | Amen. |

Of the three authorities mentioned by Layamon, it is evident that he relied chiefly upon Wace; but Layamon's poem, which contains 32,250 lines, is more than twice as long as Wace's *Brut*, and we cannot always discover any specific authority for the new material. Probably Layamon's nearness to the Welsh border afforded him the same opportunity that Geoffrey had enjoyed, of first-hand acquaintance with the Welsh legends; but it is also not unlikely that much of his narrative is of his own invention. He professes to be a historian, but in the mediæval mind the notions of history and romance were curiously blended; and therefore when we find Layamon mentioning Bede and Wace in the same breath, as equally authoritative, we need not be surprised if we also find that he regards the authority of neither as binding.

The intrinsic literary merits of Layamon's *Brut* are not inconsiderable, but the work is important chiefly

ecause of its historical position. It marks the beginng of Middle English literature. Before it, as we have en, there had for a long time been nothing of impornce except devotional works. The *Brut* itself is oser to the Old English in language and metrical rm than to the modern; but in the romantic spirit hich pervades it, in the love of a story purely as a ory, it is akin to the French literature of the twelfth d thirteenth centuries, and to the English of the irteenth and fourteenth.

For reasons explained at the end of the last chapter, e English romances were, as a group, a century or ore later than the corresponding French forms. It is but natural that most of them should be translations adaptations of French models. Some of the earliest, owever, are thought to have been originally Teutonic ories. The English versions are from the French, but e French versions were themselves translated from, at least based upon, Germanic or English or Scandivian myths. Among these perhaps is *King Horn*, hich took final shape in English verse between the iddle and end of the thirteenth century. In this there none of the attenuated spirit of some of the Arthurian mances, — neither the half-sensual chivalry of the *nte de la Charrette*, nor the half-ascetic chivalry of rts of the Grail romances. Horn is a boy king exiled om his kingdom by paynim invaders. He has monrous adventures in strange lands, and finally returns reconquer his inheritance. The author found more light in the copious flow of blood than in the amenities knighthood. It is true that the element of love offers

the chief interest of the story, but even the love-making is distinctly different from that in the *Conte de la Charrette*. Horn was sent for by Rymenhild, a king's daughter, and when he entered her bower,

> Rymenhild up gan stonde
> and tok him bi þe honde:
> heo[1] sette him on pelle[2]
> of wyn to drinke his fulle:
> heo makede him faire chere
> and tok him abute þe swere.[3]
> Ofte heo him custe[4]
> so wel so hire[5] luste.[6]
> "Horn," heo sede, "wiþute strif
> þu shalt haue me to þi wif.
> Horn, haue of me rewþe[7]
> and pliȝt me þi trewþe."
> Horn þo[8] him biþoȝte
> what he speke miȝte,
> *etc.*

It is to be noted, in passing, that *King Horn* exhibits a stage of transition between the Old English and the modern poetry, not only in its substance, but also in its metrical form. Each line seems to be modeled roughly upon the half-line of the older poetry, for it contains two important accented syllables, and an indeterminate number of unaccented ones; but instead of being bound together by alliteration these lines are generally made to rime. Old-fashioned alliteration is indeed common in the poem, but it is not obligatory. In Layamon's *Brut* rime is not uncommon but, as we have seen, alliteration is the rule.

[1] she. [2] dais. [3] neck. [4] kissed. [5] her. [6] pleased. [7] pity. [8] then.

**28. Malory's Morte Darthur.** — Some forty English romances are easily accessible in modern editions. In general, they were written in more or less close imitation of the French fashions already described, even when they were not actual translations. They tell stories of all the strange worlds of mediæval fiction; but the world of Homeric myth, or the world of Charlemagne and Roland, gave no such pleasure in England as that of Arthur's Round Table, and consequently most of the best English romances belong to the Arthurian cycle. Among these are *Gawayne and the Green Knight*, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, *Lancelot of the Lake*, and the *Morte Arthur*. All abound in fantastical deeds of chivalrous valor. For example, in *Lancelot of the Lake* we are told of one of Arthur's neighbors, the mighty King Galiot, who wantonly invades Arthur's land for the purpose of reducing it to subjection. After a long and fierce contest, Galiot finds that he is on the point of winning an overwhelming victory; but as he sees that Arthur's forces are no match for him, and that therefore there will be no great glory in such a result, he decides to withdraw for a year, to give Arthur time to strengthen himself. At the year's end he somewhat illogically brings back with him three times as many men as he had at first, and the struggle is renewed with the old ferocity. In both battles, of course, Lancelot is the hero, and in both battles his one desire is to attract the favorable attention of Guinevere, who watches from the walls.

But the noblest specimen of English mediæval romance is Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, written about

1470. This was an attempt to put into English prose a compendious account of all the deeds of Arthur and his knights, as related in the best of the early French romances. It was a unification of the whole Arthurian cycle, made long after the flourishing period of romance by a knight who loved the bygone literature of chivalry, and was unwilling to let it die.

Sir Thomas Malory's compilation is not faultlessly made. It is full of inconsistencies and confusing digressions, and where the author had his choice between two versions of a story he sometimes chose the inferior one. There is little in it that shows invention, for the best incidents and characters were transferred bodily from older books. But the author had one great gift — the gift of style. His English is sometimes loose and often awkward, but it is always picturesque and vivid, and it makes the narrative live. It is therefore the best reading for one who wants a general introduction to mediæval romance.

The *Morte Darthur* well illustrates the complexity of the spirit of mediæval romance. Malory reproduced the moral spirit of the court when he told the Tale of the Car, and that of the cloister when he told the Quest of the Grail. Part of the time we are asked to sympathize with Lancelot and Guinevere as we should with any romantic lovers, and part of the time they are penitents in sackcloth and ashes. Malory took the stories as he found them, making little effort to reconcile their discrepancies.

Some idea of the way in which successive generations of romancers used the materials of the Arthur legend

may be obtained by comparing several accounts of a single incident, such as, for example, the death of the king. Geoffrey of Monmouth, after describing Arthur's campaign against his sister's son, Modred, and the death of the latter in the last great battle in the west, says:

But the renowned King Arthur was mortally wounded also; and being carried thence to the Island of Avallon for the healing of his wounds, he abdicated the crown of Britain to his kinsman Constantine, son of Cador the Duke of Cornwall, in the 542d year of our Lord's incarnation.

Layamon's account (modernized) is as follows:

And Arthur was wounded with a broad war-spear. Fifteen dreadful wounds he had, in the least of which one might thrust two gloves. Then there were no more left there in that fight, of the two hundred thousand men that lay there hewn to pieces, save only Arthur the king and two of his knights. Arthur was most grievously wounded. There came to him a lad that was of his own kin, the son of Cador, Earl of Cornwall; Constantine was the lad's name, and he was dear to the king. Arthur looked on him as he lay on the ground, and spoke these words with sorrowful heart: "Constantine, thou art welcome; thou wert Cador's son. Here I commit to thee my kingdom: guard thou my Britons to the end of thy life, and keep for them all the laws that have stood in my days, and all the good laws that stood in the days of Uther. And I will go to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the beautiful queen of the elves; and she shall make all my wounds sound, and make me whole with healing draughts. And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom and dwell with the Britons with great joy."

Even at these words there came from the sea a little boat floating with the waves, and two women therein of

wondrous beauty; and they straightway took Arthur into the boat, and gently laid him down, and so they departed. Then was it accomplished as Merlin had said, that there should be measureless sorrow of Arthur's departure. But the Britons believe yet that he is alive, and dwells in Avalun with the fairest of all elves; and they are still ever expecting when Arthur shall return. But there was never man born, nor beloved of woman, that can truthfully say more of Arthur.

In the course of the centuries that elapsed before Malory gave the final mediæval version of the story, many new details were added. The subject of the king's death, and the speculation as to his return, fills two and a half chapters of the *Morte Darthur*. Only the greater part of the first can be given here.

"A, Syr Launcelot," sayd kyng Arthur, "thys day have I sore myst the. Alas! that ever I was ayenst the, for now have I my dethe, wherof Syr Gauwayn me warned in my dreme." Than Syr Lucan took up the kyng the one parte, and Syr Bedwere the other parte, and in the lyftyng the kyng sowned, and Syr Lucan fyl in a sowne wyth the lyfte, that the parte of his guttes fyl oute of his bodye. And therwyth the noble knyghtes herte braste. And whan the kyng awake, he behelde Syr Lucan how he laye fooming at the mowth, and parte of his guttes laye at his feet. "Alas!" sayd the kyng, "thys is to me a ful hevy syght to see thys noble duke so deye for my sake, for he wold have holpen me that had more nede of helpe than I. Alas! he wold not complayne hym, hys herte was so sette to helpe me. Now Jhesu have mercy upon hys soule." Than Syr Bedwere wepte for the deth of his brother. "Leve thys mornyng and wepyng," sayd the kyng, "for al this wyl not avaylle me; for wyte thou wel, and I myght lyve my self, the deth of Syr Lucan wolde greve me ever more, but

my tyme hyeth fast," sayd the kyng. "Therfore," sayd Arthur unto Syr Bedwere, "take thou Excalybur, my good swerde, and goo with it to yonder water syde, and whan thou comest there, I charge the throwe my swerde in that water, and come ageyn and telle me what thou there seest." "My lord," sayd Bedwere, "your commaundement shal be doon, and lyghtly brynge you worde ageyn."

So Syr Bedwere departed, and by the waye he behelde that noble swerde, that the pomel and the hafte was al of precyous stones; and thenne he sayd to hym self, "Yf I throwe this ryche swerde in the water, therof shal never come good, but harme and losse." And thenne Syr Bedwere hydde Excalybur under a tree. And so as sone as he myght he came ageyn unto the kyng, and sayd he had ben at the water, and had throwen the swerd in to the water. "What sawe thou there?" sayd the kyng. "Syr," he sayd, "I sawe nó thynge but wawes and wyndes." "That is untrewly sayd of the," sayd the kynge. "Therfore goo thou lyghtelye ageyn, and do my commaundemente; as thou arte to me leef and dere, spare not but throwe it in." Than Syr Bedwere retorned ageyn, and took the swerde in hys hande, and than hym thought synne and shame to throwe awaye that nobyl swerde; and so efte he hydde the swerde, and retorned ageyn and tolde to the kyng that he had ben at the water, and done his commaundemente. "What sawe thou there?" sayd the kyng. "Syr," he sayd, "I sawe no thynge but the waters wappe and wawes wanne." "A, traytour, untrewe," sayd kyng Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twyse. Who wold have wente that thou that hast been to me so leef and dere, and thou arte named a noble knyghte, and wold betraye me for the richesse of the swerde? But now goo ageyn lyghtly, for thy longe taryeng putteth me in grete jeopardye of my lyf, for I have taken colde; and but yf thou do now as I byd the, yf ever I may see the I shal slee the with myn owne handes, for thou woldest for my ryche swerde see me dede."

Thenne Syr Bedwere departed, and wente to the swerde, and lyghtly took hit up, and wente to the water syde, and there he bounde the gyrdyl aboute the hyltes, and thenne he threwe the swerde as farre in to the water as he myght. And there cam an arme and an hande above the water and mette it, and caught it, and so shoke it thryse and braundysshed; and than vanysshed awaye the hande wyth the swerde in the water. So Syr Bedwere came ageyn to the kyng and tolde hym what he sawe.

"Alas!" sayd the kyng, "helpe me hens, for I drede me I have taryed over longe." Than Syr Bedwere toke the kyng upon his backe, and so wente wyth hym to that water syde, and whan they were at the water syde, evyn fast by the banke hoved a lytyl barge wyth many fayr ladyes in hit, and emonge hem al was a quene, and al they had blacke hoodes, and al they wepte and shryked whan they sawe kyng Arthur. "Now put me in to the barge," sayd the kyng; and so he dyd softelye. And there receyved hym thre quenes wyth grete mornyng, and soo they sette hem doun, and in one of their lappes kyng Arthur layed hys heed, and than that quene sayd, "A, dere broder, why have ye taryed so longe from me? Alas! this wounde on your heed hath caught overmoche colde." And soo than they rowed from the londe, and Syr Bedwere behelde all tho ladyes goo from hym. Than Syr Bedwere cryed, "A, my lord Arthur, what shal become of me, now ye goo from me and leve me here allone emonge myn enemyes?" "Comfort thy self," sayd the kyng, "and doo as wel as thou mayst, for in me is no truste for to truste in. For I wyl in to the vale of Avylyon, to hele me of my grevous wounde. And yf thou here never more of me, praye for my soule." But ever the quenes and ladyes wepte and shryched, that hit was pyte to here. And assone as Syr Bedwere had loste the syght of the baarge, he wepte and waylled, and so took the foreste.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

**29. The Bestiary.** — Retracing our way to the thirteenth century, we find that the development of the romantic spirit had little or no effect upon the purely religious literature of England. There were paraphrases of the Scriptures, lives of saints, sermons, and other kinds of didactic writing, in greater abundance than before. The legend of St. Alexis has already been considered. One other specimen will serve, not indeed as a type, for it is unique in English literature, but as a curious illustration of some phases of mediæval feeling. The *Bestiary* begins as follows:

*Natura leonis prima.*

Đe leun stant on hille,
and he man hunten here,
Oðer ðurg his nese smel
Smake ðat he negge,
Bi wilc weie so he wile
To dele niðer wenden,
Alle hise fet-steppes
After him he filleð,
Drageð dust wið his stert
ðer he dun steppeð,
Oðer dust oðer deu,
ðat he ne cunne is finden,
driueð dun to his den
ðar he him bergen wille.

In modern English this and the lines immediatel succeeding are as follows:

*First nature of the lion.*

The lion stands on a hill.
If he hear a man hunting,
Or through his nose's scent
Perceive that he approaches,
By whatsoever way he will
Go down to the valley,
All his footsteps
After him he filleth;
Draggeth dust with his tail
Into the places where he steps,
(Either dust or dew),
So the hunter cannot find them;
And so runs down to his den
Where he will hide himself.

*Second.*

Another nature he hath:
When he is born
Still lieth the lion,
And he stirreth not from sleep
Till the sun hath shone
Thrice about him.
Then his father raiseth him
With the roar that he makes.

*Third.*

The third law hath the lion:
When he lies down to sleep
He shall never shut
The lids of his eyes.

*Signification of the first nature.*

Very high is that hill
Which is the kingdom of heaven.
Our Lord is the lion
Who lives there above.
How when it pleased him
To alight here on earth,
Might never devil know,
Though he be a clever hunter,
How he came down
Nor how he made his den
In that gentle maiden,
Mary by name,
Who bore him for the good of man.

*Second and third.*

When our Lord was dead,
And buried, as his will was,
In a stone still he lay
Till it came the third day.
His Father aided him so
That he rose from the dead then,
To keep us alive.
He waketh (so is his will)
As a shepherd for his flock;
He is shepherd, we are sheep;
Shield us he will,
If we hearken to his word
That we go nowhere astray.

The rest of the poem takes up a number of other nals, points out their supposed peculiarities, and exns their allegorical significance. The quaintest part, haps, is that about the elephant. He is described as

an Indian animal of such unwieldy build that if he ever falls down he cannot get up again without help. When he is sick he wades into deep water, which keeps him half afloat, and when he wants to sleep he leans against a tree. Hunters sometimes discover which are the elephant's favorite trees, and saw them half in two; so that when the animal comes to one of them and trustfully leans against it, it yields and he falls down. Then, however, he roars aloud, and other elephants come to help him. They struggle hard, but are unsuccessful; so they add their cries to his, and then a little elephant comes up: he pushes his head under the sufferer's side, as a sort of wedge, and so raises him. Then follows the "signification." Adam fell through a tree, and in his fall the whole race was lost. Man cried aloud to heaven, and Moses and the prophets came, but they could not raise him to his former estate; but they all lifted up their voices, and at last Christ came, and through him the redemption was accomplished.

This poem aptly illustrates the unscientific credulity of the mediæval mind, and also its fondness for allegory. These two qualities are the essence of much of the beauty of mediævalism, in the forms in which modern artists have sought to revive it. In the nineteenth-century pre-Raphaelites, for example, we find a mystical faculty for seeing in material wonders a deep spiritual significance. In their hands mediævalism assumes a rare and genuine beauty, but they have accomplished this by a transformation rather than by a literal reproduction of its spirit. The *Bestiary* illustrates not unfairly the usual crudeness of the original.

The origin of this poem is obscure. The ancients were fond of ascribing fabulous qualities to animals, as we know from Æsop's fables, for example. The early Christians, who had a passion for allegory, devised Christian interpretations of these qualities, and in the course of time custom established a fixed myth and a fixed signification for each animal. The panther, for example, who always suggested Christ, was a beautiful animal with a sweet-scented breath. As early as the fourth century a certain Christian writer, having occasion to mention a peculiar "nature" of the serpent, cites "the physiologists" as authority; from which we may infer that Bestiaries already existed. In the middle ages a dozen or more of them were written, in a dozen different languages; and they were commonly spoken of as written by "Physiologus." Thus we read in Chaucer that

> Chauntecleer so free
> Song merier than the mermayde in the see;
> For Phisiologus seith sikerly[1]
> How that they singen wel and merily.

A Latin Bestiary of the eighth century is the earliest known, but evidently not the earliest written. Of course these books were written for the instruction of the people; and it seems pretty clear that their odd stories must have been believed. This is not so hard to understand, when we recall the strange beliefs we ourselves held in childhood, about ear-wigs, darning-needles, horse-hair snakes, etc.

[1] Certainly.

**30. The Earliest Lyrics.** — The following song is preserved in a manuscript in the British Museum. Its date must be about 1250.

Sumer is icumen in, lhude sing cuccu:
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med[1] and springþ þe wude nu:[2]
Sing cuccu.
Awe beteþ after lomb, lhouþ[3] after calue cu:
Bulluc sterteþ,[4] bucke uerteþ,[5] murie sing, cuccu.
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes þu, cuccu; ne swik[6] þu nauer nu.

The following is of slightly later date. Only the first half of the song is given here.

Bytuene Mershe & Aueril
When spray biginneþ to springe,
þe lutel foul haþ hire wyl
On[7] hyre lud[8] to synge;
Ich[9] libbe[10] in louelonginge
For semlokest[11] of alle þynge;
He[12] may me blisse bringe,
Icham[13] in hire baundoun.[14]
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,[15]
Ichot[16] from heuene it is me sent,
From alle wymmen mi loue is lent[17]
& lyht[18] on Alysoun.

On heu[19] hire her[20] is fayr ynoh,
Hire browe broune, hire eȝe blake;
Wiþ lossum[21] chere he on me loh;[22]

[1] mead. [2] now. [3] loweth. [4] leapeth. [5] runs to cover. [6] cease. [7] according to. [8] voice. [9] I. [10] live. [11] the fairest. [12] she. [13] I am. [14] power. [15] A happy fortune I have achieved. [16] I wot. [17] turned. [18] alighted. [19] hue. [20] hair. [21] lovely. [22] laughed.

Wiþ middel smal & wel ymake;[1]
Bote[2] he me wolle to hire take,
Forte[3] buen hire owen make,[4]
Longe to lyuen ichulle[5] forsake,
& feye[6] fallen adoun.
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,
Ichot from heuene it is me sent,
From alle wymmen mi loue is lent
& lyht on Alysoun.

oth these songs are simple and crude, but they have ething that is better than polish, namely, spontaneity. *Cuckoo Song* is commonly regarded as of popular in, like our southern negro melodies, for example; the words are accompanied in the manuscript with music, and experts say that the music is too elaborate a true folk-song. Probably both songs were com-ɔd by educated men,—clerks, as they were commonly ɔd,—and doubtless there were many like them which "hendy hap" has preserved for us. During the y Middle English period the great universities were ınding, and sending out continually greater numbers lerks. At the same time, as we shall see, the church not extending its usefulness. Thus there came being an increasing number of wandering clerks, ɔated for the church but only nominally attached . They had studied rhetoric and theology at Paris Oxford, but had observed human nature in wayside rns; and they could use the lyrical art of France ive expression to the life and character of England. ucer tells us of two unbeneficed clerks; one was

nade. [2] unless. [3] for to. [4] mate. [5] I will. [6] dying.

a sober and God-fearing man who spent all his slender means on books, and cared for little beyond learning and devotion; but the other sang and played the psaltery, and cultivated habits of study only because they helped him to mask his worldly inclinations. With a large and increasing leisure class of this sort, it was natural that a considerable body of secular lyrics should come into being.

**31. Fabliau and Satire.** — The *fabliaux* were a species of short verse-narrative very common in France during the thirteenth century, — that is, during the best period of the romances of chivalry. Only one English *fabliau* has come down to us from this period, but that one illustrates some interesting features of contemporary life. It is known as *Dame Siriz*, and is substantially as follows:

There was once a clerk named Wilekin, who fell in love with a married woman, Margeri. He called on her once when her husband had gone to town on business, told her how for many a year he had been pining for her, and begged her to accept his love. She assured him with emphatic vows that she would not think of such a thing for a moment; that she and her husband were very happy together, and that she was not the kind of woman to deceive him. Wilekin accordingly went away heavy at heart; but it occurred to him that the wise witch, Dame Siriz, might help him. He called on her, therefore, and besought her with fair speech to use some of her charms to turn the heart of the fair Margeri. The old hag assumed at first an air of virtuous indignation, protesting that she was a holy woman, ignorant of all the arts of witchcraft, and devoted to alms-deeds and prayer. When, however, Wilekin offered her a pair of shoes, some warm furs, and

noney to boot, she decided that she could conscientiously nterfere in his behalf. Accordingly she calls her dog, ›uts pepper in its eyes and mustard in its mouth, and takes t to the house of Margeri. There she begs for food and lrink, and after the good wife has supplied her wants she ›ursts into tears. "Poor woman," said Margeri, "what ıileth thee?" "Alas," replied the witch, "I had a beau-:iful daughter; a lovelier girl no man ever saw; and she was married to an excellent husband whom she loved all :oo well. One day when he had gone out there came a :onsured clerk and offered her his love, but she would ıave none of him; and then he wrought an enchantment ıpon her, and turned her into a dog. This is my daughter :hat I am telling you about; see how her eyes water, and ıow the tears flow down her cheeks. No wonder, then, hat my heart is burst asunder. And any young wife to vhom a clerk offers his love must care very little for her ife if she does not accept his offer straightway." Thereıpon the simple young woman is in terror lest a similar nischance befall her, and she begs Dame Siriz to find Wilekin and bring him back to her. When he comes she ıays, "Welcome, Wilekin, sweet thing; thou art more wel-:ome than the king. I have changed my mind, and would ıot for anything have you suffer." And so they are recon-:iled, and Dame Siriz leaves them happy in each other's love.

*The Vox and the Wolf*, a poem of some 300 lines vritten about the year 1300, may well be classed with *Dame Siriz*, although strictly it is not a *fabliau*. That ıame is commonly reserved for comic stories about :ommon people. *The Vox and the Wolf* is a version of ›art of the great French pseudo-epic which celebrated :he deeds of Reynard the Fox; but in spirit, as we shall ›ee, it has more of the *fabliau* than of the epic or the :omance.

A fox came from the woods, half dead with hunger. He did not walk along the street, for he disliked meeting men; he would rather have met one hen than fifty women. So he skulked along till he came to a house in which there were five hens and a cock. The cock had flown up to his roost, and two of the hens sat near him. "Fox," said the cock, "what dost thou there? Curse you, go home. You are always making trouble with our hens. For heaven's sake, be still." (Here the narrative is a little confusing, but apparently the fox eats one or more of the hens.) Then quoth the fox, "Sir Chanticleer, come down here. I have only been doing your hens a kindness; I have let their blood; they had a disease under the rib, and would have died if I had not bled them. Come down, for you have the same trouble in the spleen, and you have but a short time to live. I must either bleed you, or go for the priest."

But the cock was proof against his blandishments; and the fox had to rest content with the prey already seized. Now, however, he began to suffer the torments of thirst, and sought a well. There was one close by, with two buckets so attached that when one went up the other went down. Not understanding the contrivance, the fox jumped into the upper bucket, hoping to find water there; and down it went with him to the bottom. There was water enough down there, to be sure, and he drank his fill, but yet he was not easy in his mind, and he straightway began to repent of his sins.

Just then a wolf came by, seeking something to allay the pangs of hunger, and sat down for a moment by the well. The fox knew him by his howl, for they were near neighbors. "Ah, Sigrim," he cried, "how I wish you were here with me!" "With you!" said the wolf; "what should I be doing in the pit?" "You are unwise," replied the fox; "here is the bliss of paradise; here I have everlasting happiness in prospect, without pain or sorrow.

Here are meat and drink, and bliss without labor; here is no more hunger, nor any other woe." The wolf laughed. "Are you dead," said he, "or alive?" "Why should I care to be alive?" replied the fox; "why live in the filthy and sinful world, when there are all sorts of joys here? There are sheep and goats down here." This last was too much for the wolf, and he begged the fox to show him the way thither. The fox accordingly required him to shrive himself (Reynard acting as father confessor), and after the wolf had given a humiliating account of his sins, the fox directed him to get into the bucket that he saw at the top of the well.

So down went the wolf, and when he was halfway down he was surprised to see the fox going up. "What now, Gossip," said the wolf, "whither wilt?" "I am going up," said the fox; "go you down, and take what you can find there. I am heartily glad that you have repented and confessed. I will have your knell rung, and masses sung for your soul." So the fox ran away, and the wolf remained at the bottom, cursing. In the morning a friar came to the well to draw water, and found the bucket heavy enough. When he had drawn it nearly to the top he saw the wolf, and cried, "The devil is in the pit!" Thereupon his brethren came with pikes and staves and stones, and the wolf was done to death.

One other specimen of the comic literature of the time will suffice. This is *The Land of Cokaygne*, an English version of a satirical fantasy current in many languages in the thirteenth century. The English poem is perhaps as late as 1300.

Fur in see bi west Spayngne
Is a lond ihote Cokaygne.
þer nis[1] lond under heuen-riche[2]

[1] is not. [2] heaven's kingdom.

Of wel, of godnis, hit iliche;[1]
Þoȝ paradis be miri and briȝt,
Cokaygn is of fairir siȝt.
What is þer in paradis
Bot grasse and flure and grene ris?[2]
. . . . . .

Beþ þer no man but two,
Hely[3] and Enok also;
Elinglich[4] may hi[5] go,
Whar þer woniþ[6] men no mo.

In Cokaygne is met and drink
Wiþute care, how,[7] and swink.[8]

Everything good is plentiful. There are no snakes, fleas, rainstorms or diseases; and water is used only to swim in, or to beautify the landscape. Rivers are generally of milk, honey, and wine. In this land there is a beautiful abbey. Its walls are all of pasties, fish, and meat; the shingles are pan-cakes and the turrets are puddings. There are charming song-birds to delight the ear day and night, and geese fly ready roasted on the spit, crying, "geese all hot, all hot." Smaller fowl, broiled and seasoned, fly right into a man's mouth when he wants them.

The young monks go out to play every afternoon. They spread out their broad sleeves and their hoods for wings, and fly through the air like any bird, and the abbot delights to watch them. When it is time for evensong he makes a loud noise by spanking some young novice; and the monks, hearing the sound, come gleefully back. They merrily join in the spanking, and then go meekly in for their evening service and their evening drink.

There are other occupations in this abbey, of a more degraded nature. Whoever proves himself best adapted

[1] like. [2] branches. [3] Elijah. [4] sorrowfully. [5] they. [6] dwell. [7] trouble. [8] toil.

to the life, and devotes himself with most singleness of purpose to fleshly enjoyments, will eventually rise to be the father abbot.

The man who wants to reach this blissful land must first do a long penance; he must wallow for seven years in the filth of a pig-sty, buried up to the chin. So shall he earn his passage.

It is important to observe that all these poems were written in the romantic period; yet their authors' attitude towards life is diametrically opposite to that of the romancers. Love, instead of being a kind of idolatry, is a game played with false cards. Saintliness is all humbug, and holy men are rascals. Women are harmless only if they are stupid; generally they are clever, deceitful creatures, unworthy of confidence and incapable of constancy, and men are their dupes.

All this is expressed not in bitterness, but with the gay good-humor of a man who has too little sensibility to be a cynic. Most of the *fabliaux* are hardly satirical at all in intent. In *Dame Siriz*, for example, the author gives us in effect a trenchant satire upon some of the things that were sacred to the romancers; but his purpose was doubtless merely to tell an amusing story, presenting life as he saw it. The satire in *The Vox and the Wolf* is equally unconscious. In *The Land of Cokaygne* there is of course a deliberate intent to satirize the regular clergy, and the utter lack of spirituality in much of what passed for religion; but (except perhaps in the last lines of the poem) we see little evidence of any strength of feeling. Whatever is, is; so let us laugh and be merry at everything.

The difference in spirit between these poems and the romances is easy to explain. The *fabliaux* were commonly composed for the middle classes — the *bourgeois* element. Political and economic causes were, in the thirteenth century, bringing these people forward to a more active participation in affairs; and they had to have their literature, too. In the hall of the baron the romancer chanted his romance; but the master-carpenter, loafing at the ale-house, would prefer to hear a *fabliau* recited, and some twopenny *jongleur* would always be ready to gratify him. The *fabliaux* were certainly not above the average level of mediæval sentiment and morality; they probably bore about the same relation to life as the comic songs of our own variety stage, and they must not be taken too seriously as a revelation of contemporary feeling. But their existence, side by side with the romances of chivalry, strengthens the argument that the latter, in their semi-deification of love and their seemingly reverential attitude towards woman, were little more than a caprice of fashion; that instead of presenting seriously the attitude of serious men toward life, they were in this respect merely a literary artifice.

A glimpse is given in these poems of the darker side of mediæval religion. Before the period that we have reached, monasticism had gone into a lamentable decadence. It was a natural result of the attractiveness of monastery life that many men dedicated themselves to it with motives not primarily religious. Partly for this reason, and partly because of a tendency of human nature which seems inevitable, when responsibility and competition are removed, monastic austerity too often

yielded place to monastic luxury, continence to corruption, altruism to rapacity. Of course no sweeping condemnation must be passed upon all the monasteries of the period. New orders were continually founded, with new rules of self-denial and holiness; scores of them are known to history; but the chief cause of the great number of new foundations was the short-lived purity of many of the old ones. Moreover, the secular clergy (*i.e.*, the clergy not attached to religious establishments, as were the monks, friars, etc.) shared to a great extent in the corruptions of the regular brethren. In the later middle ages the parish priest becomes a target for satire as well as the monk — the bishop only less often than the abbot.

**32. Richard Rolle of Hampole.** — Richard Rolle was born at Thornton, in Yorkshire, near the end of the thirteenth century, and died in the year 1349 at Hampole, near Doncaster. He was educated at Oxford, but at the age of nineteen left the university and his home to assume the garb and manner of a hermit. His life thereafter was partly that of a recluse and partly that of a wandering preacher, as the spirit moved him. In his solitary cell he fasted and prayed, and wrote voluminous works in prose and verse. In his other capacity he was one of the most influential men of the time. He had a power over others which his words alone do not account for. He was evidently a holy man, — not one of the sham religious tramps so common in the fourteenth century, — and his eloquence was abetted by the power of a strong and pure personality. He was reputed to have the power of performing miracles, and it is clear that he believed

himself to have it. He had an active mind, but not a speculative one. Consequently we find him one of the strongest exponents of mediæval Catholicism. He accepted the doctrines of the church without question, and preached them with vigor; and in his long poem, *The Pricke of Conscience*, we can see the faith of the middle ages in its purest form. The following extracts are selected less for their doctrinal interest than as illustrations of the practical working of mediæval religion in the mediæval mind.

(*The beginning of man's life.*)

[When man] was born til [1] þis werldys light
He ne had nouther strenthe ne myght,
Nouther to ga [2] ne yhit to stand,
Ne to crepe with fote, ne with hand.
Þan has a man less myght þan a beste
When he is born, and is sene leste:
For a best when it es born, may ga
Als-tite [3] aftir, and ryn to and fra;
Bot a man has na [4] myght þar-to,
When he es born, swa [5] to do;
For þan may he noght stande ne crepe
Bot ligge [6] and sprawel, and cry and wepe.
For unnethes [7] es a child born fully
Þat it ne bygynnes to goule and cry;
And by þat cry men knaw þan
Whether it be man or weman,
For when it es born it cryes swa [8]:
If it be man it says "a. a,"
Þat þe first letter es of þe nam
Of our forme-fader Adam.

[1] to. [2] go, walk. [3] straightway. [4] no. [5] so. [6] lie. [7] hardly. [8] so.

And if þe child a woman be,
When it es born it says "e. e."
E es þe first letter and þe hede
Of þe name of Eve þat bygan our dede.[1]
Þarfor a clerk made on þis manere
Þis vers of metre þat es wreten here:

. . . . . .

He says, "al er we born gretand,[2]
And makand[3] a sorowful sembland,
For to shew þe grete wrechednes
Of our kynd þat in us es."

. . . . . .

(*The nature of the mature man.*)

Þe bygynnyng of man, als[4] I talde,
Es vile and wreched to behalde;
Bot how foule es man aftir-warde
Tels þus, openly, saynt Bernarde:
*Homo nihil aliud est, quam sperma fetidum, saccus stercorum et esca vermium.*
Saynt Bernard says als þe buke telles,
Þat "man here es nathyng elles
Bot a foule slyme, wlatsome[5] til men,
And a sekful[6] of stynkand fen,[7]
And wormes fode" þat þai wald have,
When he es dede and layde in grave.
Bot som men and women fayre semes
To þe syght with-outen, als men demes,
And þat shewes noght elles bot a skyn;
Bot wha-swa moght se þam with-in,
Fouler carion moght never be
Þan he suld þan of þam se.
Þarfor he þat had als sharp syght,

[1] death. [2] weeping. [3] making. [4] as. [5] loathsome. [6] sackful. [7] dirt.

And cler eghen [1] and als bright
Als has a best þat men Lynx calles,
Þat may se thurgh thik stane walles,
Littel lykyng suld a man haf þan
For to behald a faire woman,
For þan mught he se, with-outen doute,
Als wele with-in als with-oute,
And if he with-in saw hir right,
Sho [2] war ful wlatsom til his sight;
Þus foul with-in ilk [3] man es,
Als þe buk says and bers witnes.
. . . . . .

(*The certainty of death.*)

For in þis world es nane swa witty,
Swa fair, swa strang, ne swa myghty,
Emperour, kyng, duke, ne caysere,
Ne other þat bers grete state here,
Ne riche, ne pure, bond ne fre,
Lered [4] or lawed,[5] what-swa he be,
Þat he ne sal turne at þe last oway,
Til poudre and erthe and vyle clay;
And wormes sal ryve hym in sondre;
And þarfor haf I mykel [6] wondere
Þat unnethes [7] any man wille se
What he was, and what he sal be.
Bot wha-so wald in hert cast
What he was, and sal be at þe last,
And what he es, whyles he lyves here,
He suld fynd ful litel matere
To mak ioy whilles he here duelles,
Als a versifiour in metre þus telles:
*Si quis sentiret, quo tendit, et unde veniret,*
*Nunquam gauderet, sed in omne tempore fleret.*

[1] eyes. [2] she. [3] each. [4] learned. [5] lewd, ignorant. [6] much, great. [7] hardly.

He says, "wha-so wille fele and se,
Wethen he com and whider sal he,
Suld never be blythe bot ioy forsake,
And alle tyme grete[1] and sorow make."
Whar-to þan es man here swa myry,
And swa tendre of his vile body,
Þat sal rote and with wormes be gnawen,
And swa ugly to syght may be knawen?

. . . . . .

(*The pains of death.*)

Þus sal dede visite ilk man,
And yhit na man discryve[2] it can,
For here lyves nan,[3] under hevenryke,[4]
Þat can telle til what þe ded es lyke.
Bot þe payn of dede þat al sal fele
A philosopher þus discrived wele;
For he lykend mans lyf til a tre
Þat war growand,[5] if it swa mught be,
Thurgh a mans hert and swa shuld sprynge,
Þat obout war lapped with þe hert strynge,
And þe croppe[6] out at his mouth mught shote,
And to ilka ioynt war fested a rote;
And ilka vayne of þe mans body
Had a rote festend fast þarby,
And in ilka taa and fynger of hand
War a rote fra þat tre growand;
And ilka lym on ilka syde
With rotes of þat tre war occupyde;
Yf þat tre war tite[7] pulled oute
At a titte[8] with al þe rotes oboute,
Þe rotes suld þan rayse þar-with
Ilka vayn and ilka synoghe and lith.[9]

[1] weep. [2] describe. [3] none. [4] the kingdom of heaven. [5] growing. [6] top. [7] suddenly. [8] on a sudden. [9] limb.

A mare[1] payne couthe[2] na man in hert cast
Þan þis war, als lang als it suld last.
And yhit halde I þe payne of dede mare
And mare strang and hard, þan þis payn ware.

. . . . . .

For when þe lyf sal pas fra a man
Devels sal gadir obout hym þan,
To ravissche þe saul with þam away
Tyl pyne of helle, if þai may.
Als wode[3] lyons þai sal þan fare
And raumpe on hym, and skoul, and stare,
And grymly gryn on hym and blere,[4]
And hydus braydes[5] mak, hym to fere;[6]
Þai sal fande[7] at his last endyng
Hym in-to wanhope[8] for to bring,
Thurgh thretynges þat þai sal mak,
And thurgh þe ferdnes[9] þat he sal tak.
Ful hydus sightes þai sal shew hym
Þat his chere[10] sal make grisly and grim.
Þat sight he sal se with gastly eghe[11]
With payn of dede þat he most dreghe.[12]

. . . . . .

(*The pains of hell.*)

I fynde wryten paynes fourtene,
Thurgh whilk[13] þe synful sal be pyned ay,
In body and saul aftir domesday;
Þe whilk er als general paynes of helle,
And whilk þas er I sal yhow telle.
Þe first es fire swa hate[14] to reken
Þat na maner of thyng may it sleken.[15]

[1] greater. [2] could. [3] mad. [4] leer. [5] grimaces. [6] terrify. [7] try. [8] despair. [9] fright. [10] countenance. [11] eye. [12] endure. [13] which. [14] hot. [15] quench.

Þe secunde es calde als says som,
Þat na hete of fire may overcom.
Þe thred alswa es filthe and stynk
Þat es stranger þan any hert may thynk.
Þe ferthe es hunger sharpe and strang.
Þe fift es brynnand threst omang.[1]
Þe sext es swa mykel myrknes,[2]
Þat it may be graped, swa thik it es.
Þe sevend es þe horribel sight
Of þe devels þat þar er hydusly dight.
Þe eghtend payne es vermyn grete,
Þat þe synful men sal gnaw and frete.[3]
Þe neghend es dyngyng[4] of devels hand,
With melles[5] of yren hate glowand.
Þe tend payne es gnawing with-in
Of conscience þat bites als vermyn.
Þe ellevend es hate teres of gretyng,[6]
Þat þe synful sal scalden in þe dounfallyng.
Þe twelfte es shame and shenshepe[7] of syn
Þat þai sal haf þat never sal blyn.[8]
Þe þrettend es bandes of fire brinnand,
Þat þai sal be bunden with fote and hand.
Þe fourtend payne despayre es cald,
Þat þe synful sal ay in hert hald.
Alle þir[9] er generale paynes in helle:
Bot þar er other ma þan tung may telle,
Or hert may thynk or eer may here,
Of special paynes þat er sere,[10]
Þe whilk many, aftir[11] þai er worthy,
Sal thole[12] ever-mare in saule and body;
Bot of alle þa paynes can I noght say,
For na man þam reken ne specyfy may.

[1] in addition. [2] darkness. [3] eat. [4] beating. [5] mallets. [6] weeping. [7] disgrace. [8] cease. [9] these. [10] various. [11] according [12] suffer.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE AGE OF CHAUCER

**33. The Fourteenth Century.** — King Edward III reigned from 1327 to 1377. When he came to the throne he was a mere boy, helpless in the hands of his mother's favorite, Robert Mortimer, and in the last years of his reign he was a helpless old man, in the arms of his own favorite, Alice Perrers. Between those periods, however, there were great days; and the king and his illustrious son, the Black Prince, are among the most noteworthy figures in the history of English chivalry.

We are concerned chiefly with the social history of England, but part of the great social development of the fourteenth century was closely connected with the personal achievements of the king and the prince. They were at war with France during the greater part of the reign, and their victories at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) were its most striking single events. These great victories, however, won against tremendous numerical odds, were directly due to developments within the English nation. The old idea of chivalry, to which France still clung, was that the knights did all the heavy fighting, while the peasantry were a mere rabble whose safety or slaughter was of little consequence. At the Battle of Crécy the French chivalry encountered the English yeomanry with their long-bows and cloth-yard arrows, and could not get

near enough to crush them. At Poitiers King John's army of 50,000 was utterly routed by 8000 men under the Black Prince, and the victory again was due to the English yeomen.

Thus military causes were helping the middle classes in England to a novel prominence. Other forces, too, were doing a similar work. The parliamentary system had developed far enough to bring gentlemen and burgesses of the towns together, with common aims and interests; and the industrial system was by degrees becoming one of employer and wage-earner instead of master and villein. The villein was the small tenant who, instead of paying money rent, gave a stated number of days' labor to the tillage of his master's acres. He was not in theory a slave, but neither was he practically a free man; and he had long been mildly agitating for a change. It was in the fourteenth century that the backbone of the old system was broken, and money wages and money rents generally substituted for the old conditions of feudal tenure. The Black Death, a terrible plague which visited England about the middle of the century, killing a third, and perhaps a half, of the population in a single year, was instrumental in furthering this development. It took off such a large proportion of the laboring classes that wages rose to unprecedented figures. Villeins were tempted to run away from the estates to which they were legally bound, and the peasant class in general were filled with a new spirit of independence. A tragical uprising which came in 1381 proved futile, but it was a symptom of a new social condition, an abortive effort towards that democracy which in the last few generations has revolution-

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ized the western world. The literature of the fourteenth century is filled with manifestations of the new spirit.

The religious condition of England is also of great importance in our study. It is sometimes supposed that the mediæval mind was touched with a deep and peculiar religious feeling. This belief finds expression notably in those painters and poets who seek to revive the spirit of mediæval religion. That spirit, they say, was a passionate and beautiful mysticism: the Deity was then more vividly realized than now, as a living presence in the human soul; and in spiritual communion with Him, there was an ecstasy of emotion which this harder age cannot feel. Yet it is doubtful if this assumed intensity of feeling was really commoner in the middle ages than in the nineteenth century. Distance has lent to mediæval things an enchantment not wholly proper to them. Mediæval religion was half inherited from pagan creeds, and was distinguished by a vivid anthropomorphism: to the common mind, God and Christ were primarily men of preternatural powers, but with human emotions, form and speech; and whatever we find of peculiar intensity in the common religious conceptions of the time is often due to the comparative ease with which these matter-of-fact persons were realized by the imagination. In the spiritual-minded this kind of belief took on a spiritual coloring, as we have seen, but in the majority there was little spirituality, and their religion was as gross as it was vivid. Asceticism, at best, was not the practice of the whole mediæval world, but only the ideal of a small part of it.

The corruptness of the clergy has already been mentioned. The main reason for England's long toleration

of it is to be found in the clergy's enormous power. The more fundamental reason, however, and indeed the secret of this very power, is to be found in the too common conception of religion as a mere discipline by pains and penalties. In the clergy was vested the power to forgive sins and to remit the penalties of the hereafter. The sinner who confessed was bidden to do a certain penance, as the condition of receiving absolution; the sinner who stayed away from confessional was haled before the ecclesiastical court and sentenced to a worse penance. The penance might be a fast, or a pilgrimage, or any one of countless methods of expiation; but the commands of the church must be obeyed to the letter, or terrible torments were the doom of the offender. If the church had confined this discipline to cases of vice and crime, there would have been far less cause for complaint, but it did not. The enemies of the church, and sometimes the enemies of its ministers, were treated as the enemies of God, and the church's most terrible weapon, excommunication, was hurled at them. The mere possession of this weapon was a constant temptation to the clergy to foster the popular conception of the Deity as a God of Wrath; and this conception (as has been dimly seen in the extracts already read) needed no fostering. It was partly this view of religion that gave the church its first firm grip upon English life, and though in the fourteenth century the church had ceased to command universal (or perhaps even general) respect, it was too late to shake it off.

The foregoing is not intended as a full and fair description of the mediæval English Church. That church taught the gospel of Love as well as that of Wrath; and even

with the latter it did much good to individuals, as well as much harm, for it used its power in a turbulent age to protect the weak against the strong, and to save the vicious from themselves. But the church's abuses of its power made more impression upon the literature of the fourteenth century than did its legitimate influence, and the darker side of the story is therefore of more present significance to us. It should, moreover, be especially studied by those who think of mediæval religion as only a pure and beautiful mysticism, and by those who pessimistically bewail the loss of spirituality in the modern world.

Resentment and revolt against the abuses of the church came to a head in Wyclif. He was an eminent Oxford scholar and theologian, for a time Master of Balliol College, and a center of the university's intellectual influence. In 1382, however, when he was past sixty years of age, he was expelled from the university because of his heretical teachings. He had attacked the greed of the church, advocating its disendowment (with extensive confiscation of its property); then he had assailed the several orders of friars, on account of their notorious corruptions; and finally he had in effect declared open war upon the church by avowing and inculcating disbelief in the doctrine of transubstantiation, (*i.e.*, the doctrine that the bread and wine used in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ, only the appearance of the original elements remaining). An attack upon this cardinal belief of the church was not merely a doctrinal dispute; it was a matter of vital consequence, for the clergy knew that much of their power

was due to the people's belief in their ability to perform this daily miracle; and apart from that, the belief itself has a mystical charm for those who cherish it, so that an attack upon it is felt as a peculiarly impious sacrilege.

Wyclif's followers, who were known as Lollards, were active for a generation or more after their master's death (1384), and they never were altogether suppressed; their agitation continued fitfully until it was merged in the greater Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. They were regarded as dangerous enemies of the nation, and many of them died the heretic's death at the stake. Gowned in long russet robes, their preachers wandered from town to town, finding audiences where they could, and spreading their doctrine in the face of threats and insults. Wyclif himself had been on some subjects a fanatic, whose opinions shock our judgment as often as they accord with it, and his followers inherited his fanaticism without his great intelligence; but there was much in them to admire. In holding that the rules of faith should be sought chiefly in the Bible (parts of which, if not all, Wyclif himself translated), and that clean living was worth more than ceremonies or sacraments, they were anticipating the great Reformation, and the opinion of the modern Protestant world.

**34. The Alliterative Poems.** — The principal poets of the latter half of the fourteenth century may be roughly divided into two classes, the East and West Midland schools. The former, under the influence of court or university training, and by imitation of foreign models, attained a much higher proficiency in the poetic art than any of their English predecessors. Indeed Chaucer,

who was a London man, is felt to be almost a modern poet. The West Midland men, on the other hand, living in a district where the English spirit had received less of the French leaven, clung more to old forms and old ideas, and their work seems to us thoroughly mediæval.

Four poems, commonly known as *Cleanness*, *Patience*, *Pearl*, and *Gawayne and the Green Knight*, have survived from this period in a single manuscript, all in the same handwriting and the same West Midland dialect. It is usually assumed (though not yet proved) that all are by the same author, but who or what that author was we can only guess. All except *Pearl* are in the Old English metre, with the Old English system of alliteration, although *Gawayne and the Green Knight* makes some use of rime. *Pearl* is rimed throughout, and its metre is of a smoother and finer kind, as a specimen will show. The author has retained the essential principles of the older verse, but was apparently experimenting with it.

*Cleanness* is a didactic poem of 1812 lines. By means of a number of stories from the Old Testament, such as those of Sodom and Gomorrah, Belshazzar, and Nebuchadnezzar, it shows the advantages of clean living and the fatal consequences of uncleanness. The following excerpts from the story of the flood (modernized) will show something of the character of the original:

But then evils on earth ever increased
And multiplied manifold amongst mankind,
For the powerful people oppressed the weaker,
So that the Man that made all was mightily enraged.

When he knew each country corrupt in itself,
And the people strayed from the paths of right,
Fell tempting anger touched his heart.
Sorrowing like a man, he said these words:
"I regret full much that ever I made man;
But I shall deliver and do away the dotards on earth,
And banish from my creation all creatures of flesh,
Both bird and fish and beast and man;
All shall down and be dead, and driven from the earth,
That ever I set soul in; and sorely it rues me
That ever I made them; but if I may, hereafter
I shall watch and be wary their wickedness to stop."

. . . . . .

(Accordingly the deluge is determined on, and Noah is warned to build a "chest.")

"Now, Noah," quoth our Lord, "are you all ready?
Have you stopped all the chinks in your chest with clay?"
"Yes, Lord, by your leave," said the man then;
"All is wrought after your word, as you lent me wit."
"Enter in then," quoth He, "and take your wife with you,
And your thrifty sons and their wives all three."

. . . . . .

It hardly need be pointed out that this is not in the spirit of modern religious feeling. The poem is, of course, profoundly reverential in intent, but the reverence is of the sort that might have been paid to a feudal superior,[1] not to the Supreme Being of a spiritual religion.

The highest mountains over the moor were dry then no more,
But thereon flocked the folk, for fear of the Vengeance.
The wild of the forest floated on the water.
Some swam thereon, that thought to save themselves.

[1] In *Patience*, line 51, the Deity is called "my lege lorde."

Some struggled to the heights, — stared up to heaven,
And ruefully with loud voice roared aloud for dread.
Hares, harts also, run to the heights;
Bucks, badgers and bulls hastened to the banks,
And all cried for care to the King of heaven.
For succor from the Creator they cried, each one;
But that helped not the misery, for his mercy was passed,
And all his pity departed, from the people that he hated.
By that time to their feet the flood flowed and waxed:
Then each man saw well that he needs must sink.
Friends embraced and fell upon each other,
To endure their doleful destiny and die all together.
Lover looks on beloved, and taketh his leave,
To end all at once, and for ever to part.

*Patience* is very much like *Cleanness*, enforcing an appropriate moral by the story of Jonah, but it lays proportionally a little less stress on God's anger and a little more on his mercy. *Gawayne and the Green Knight* has already been mentioned as one of the best of the Arthurian romances; but it differs from most poems of its class in being profoundly moral in spirit and in purpose. The difficulties that Gawayne encounters are temptations rather than dangers, and the reader is led to admire him more for his integrity than for his prowess. With some humor, and some elements of pathos, and an admirable vividness of natural description, it is altogether a delightful poem; but, unfortunately, the great number of obsolete words in its vocabulary put it beyond the reach of most modern readers.

*Pearl* is a touching lament over the loss of a child, probably the poet's infant daughter. It is largely allegorical. The poet tells that he was once the possessor

of a pearl of surpassing beauty, but he lost it in the green grass in a lovely arbor. One day, when he had gone to the arbor to bewail the loss of his "pearl," and was lying on the grass where it was buried, he fell asleep and dreamed that he saw the kingdom of heaven. His pearl was there, in the form of a beautiful maiden, and she told him of her happy state, comforted him in his affliction, and explained to him some of the problems that had perplexed his mind. The religious spirit of the poem is markedly different from that of *Cleanness* and *Patience*. In *Pearl* we really find some of the beautiful spirituality for which we search so much of mediæval literature in vain. The river of life, the crystal battlements of heaven, and the brilliant gems that adorn them impress us not as the vagaries of a materialistic fancy, but rather as the mystic symbols of faith and love. The Deity is a great king, but he reigns in a spiritual kingdom, and we are told to love him for his mercy, not merely to fear him for his wrath. The maiden says, for example:

In Jerusalem was my Bridegroom slain,
And rent on the rood by ruffians bold.
All our bales to bear full fain,
He took on himself our sorrows cold.
His face was all with buffets flayn,
That was so lovely to behold;—
Sinless himself, he suffered pain
For the sins of us, the sheep of his fold.
For us he let himself be sold,
And nailed upon a rough-hewn beam;
As meek as a lamb that no plaint told,
For us he died in Jerusalem.

By quoting other passages it might be shown that this poem is as superior to the others in artistic felicity as it is different in religious spirit. It would obviously be possible to argue that *Pearl* and *Cleanness* could not have been written by the same author. They were certainly not written in the same mood; but perhaps the difference is accounted for by the fact that one was a deliberate effort to teach certain practical truths, while the other was inspired by a grievous sense of personal loss.

**35. Piers Plowman.** — The most remarkable production of what we have called the West Midland school was written by a man to whom tradition gives the name of William Langland. He is supposed to have been born at Cleobury Mortimer, in Shropshire, about the year 1332, and to have received the education of a "clerk" in some western monastery, perhaps the one at Great Malvern in Worcestershire. From his poem we know that he wore the clerical tonsure and garb, that he was a gaunt, stern-featured man, much given to melancholy musings, and that he was extremely poor. His poem is an elaborate allegory, giving a detailed picture of the life of the author's time, and an eloquent denunciation of its sins. The following extracts are modernized, but are intended to reproduce the spirit of the original as fairly as possible.

(*Prologue.*)

In a summer season, when soft was the sunshine,
I dressed myself coarsely in shepherd's clothes,
In habit of a hermit, unholy of works,
And went wide in this world, wonders to hear.

But on a May morning, on Malvern Hills,
There befel a strange chance,—enchantment I thought it;—
I was weary of wandering, and went me to rest
Under a broad bank, by a burn's side;
And as I lay and leaned, and looked in the waters,
I slumbered in a sleeping, it sounded so pleasantly.
Then came to my mind a marvelous vision,
That I was in a wilderness, wist I never where.
As I looked into the East, on high to the sun,
I saw a tower on the top of a hill,
With a deep dale beneath, and a dungeon therein
With deep ditches and dark, and dreadful of sight.
A fair field full of folk found I there between,
Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich,
Working and wandering as the world requires.

. . . . . .

I saw pilgrims and palmers, pledging themselves
To seek Saint James and saints at Rome.
They went forth on their way with many wise tales,
And got leave to lie, all their lives thereafter.
I saw some that said they had sought saints:
To each tale that they told, their tongue was tempered to lie,
More than to tell truth, (so it seemed by their speech).
Hordes of hermits, with hooked staves,
Went to Walsingham[1] with their wenches following them;
Long-legged lubbers, that loth were to work,
Clothed themselves in copes, to be known from other men,
And made themselves hermits, so as to have their ease.
I found there friars, all the four orders,
Preaching to the people for their own profit,
Glosing the Gospel as they thought good.

. . . . . .

[1] A shrine of the Virgin, in Norfolk, much visited by pilgrims.

There preached a pardoner,[1] as if he were a priest;
He brought out a bull, sealed by the bishop,
And said that he himself could absolve them all
From violations of fast-days, or breaches of vows.
The ignorant believed him, and liked his words well,
And came up all kneeling to kiss his bulls;
He duped them with his indulgences, and dimmed their eyes,
And reached out with his documents for their rings and brooches;
And thus they gave their gold to keep gluttons alive.

. . . . . .

Barons and burgesses and husbandmen also
I saw in this assembly, as ye shall hear,
Baxters and brewsters and butchers many,
Woolen websters and weavers of linen,
Tailors and tinkers, and tax-collectors,
Masons and miners, and many other crafts.
Of all kinds of laborers that live there were some,
Such as diggers and delvers, that do their deeds ill,
And dawdle the livelong day, droning idle songs.
Cooks and their kitchen-knaves cried "hot pies, hot!
Good pigs and geese; go dine, go!"
Taverners unto them told the same story;
"White wine of Alsace and red wine from Gascony,
From the Rhine and Rochelle, to digest the roast meat."
All this saw I sleeping, and seven times more.

The tower mentioned in line 14 is the Tower of Truth, and the dungeon in the deep dale is the Castle of Care. The "fair field full of folk" is of course the world, and we naturally expect that the allegory will be developed

[1] Pardoners were persons commissioned by the church to sell indulgences. They raised money partly by house-to-house peddling, partly in the open air, as here. The abuses of this traffic are notorious.

n narrative form, with the field and the tower and the castle for a scenic background. In fact, however, as we follow the succession of pictures that Langland puts before us, we lose sight of these landmarks altogether. He seems to have forgotten them himself. At the end of the Prologue, for example, we have what seems to be a picture of a London street, with the cooks and the tavern-keepers at their doors, touting for custom. Farther on in the poem, some of the people get into a quarrel, and they all hurry off to Westminster to get the king to decide it; but after some satire upon the administration of justice at the capital, we are taken back again to "the field full of folk." The people are suffering much misery because of their sins, but Hope and Repentance come and speak comfortingly to them, and they all resolve to go off in search of St. Truth. (It does not seem to be remembered that he lives in the tower on the hill.)

(*Passus quintus de Visione.*)

. . . . . .

A thousand of men then thronged together,
Crying upward to Christ and his clean mother,
To let grace go with them in search of Truth.
But there was no wight so wise that knew the way thither,
But they bustled like beasts over banks and hills,
Till after long searching they saw at last a man
Appareled as a palmer, in pilgrim's wise.
He bore a staff, bound with a broad band
Wound about it in the manner of woodbine.
A bowl and a bag he bore by his side:
Phials of holy water were fastened to his hat,
Signs of Sinai, and shells from Galicia,

And many a cross on his cloak, and keys of Rome,
And the Vernicle in front, that men might know
And see by his signs what shrines he had sought.
The folk asked him first whence he had come.
"From Sinai," he said, "and from Our Lord's sepulchre;
In Bethlehem and in Babylon, — I have been in both;
And in Armenia and Alexandria, and many other places.
Ye may see by my signs that sit on my hat
That I have walked full wide, in wet and in dry,
And sought good saints, for my soul's health."
"Canst tell of a saint that men call Truth?
Couldst thou put us on the way to that person's dwelling?"
"Nay, so God help me," the holy man said;
"I never saw palmer, with pike nor with scrip,
Asking for him before, till now in this place."

Just at this juncture, Piers the Plowman, who gives his name to the poem, makes his first appearance. He tells the people that he knows all about St. Truth, for he has been his faithful servant for fifty years; and he will gladly show them the way to Truth's abode, after he has finished his day's ploughing. They accept his offer, but some wrangling which ensues is so noisy that the poet wakes from his sleep and the vision ends.

This is the poem properly called *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman.* Accounts of other visions follow it, making practically a single poem of twenty-three cantos or *passus;* and as the same character, Piers, appears in later visions, the whole collection is commonly known as *Piers Plowman.* One spirit pervades the whole — the spirit of a reformer, bitterly discontented with the world as he sees it, commending with rough but passionate eloquence his own peculiar gospel as a sort of social

panacea, yet evidently half hopeless of the issue after all. What Langland's gospel was is apparent from the extracts already given. The moral spirit of his Christianity was not utterly remote from that of the present time; honesty and industry seem to be his cardinal virtues; and the conception of society that suggested Piers the Plowman for the regenerator of the world had as much in common with modern as with mediæval thought.

There are many passages showing Langland's keen sympathy with the poor. The following may well be compared with the legend of Alexis:

For he that beggeth or biddeth, unless he have need,
He is false and a faitour, and defraudeth the needy,
And beguileth the giver, taking against his will;
For he that giveth for God's love would not give willingly
Save where he knew great need of his giving,
And most merit in the men he is giving to.
This is what Cato says, — "cui des videto";
None knows, I ween, who is worthy to have.
The most needy are our neighbors, if we look at them narrowly;
Such as prisoners in dungeons, and poor folk in cottages,
Burdened with children, and the landlord's charges.
What they save with their spinning they spend in house-hire,
And in milk and meal for making porridge,
To allay their little ones' longing for food.
They themselves also suffer much hunger,
And woe in the winter-time with waking a-nights
To rise by the bed-side and rock the cradle,
And with carding and combing and patching and washing,
And rubbing and reeling, and peeling of rushes;
So that it is pity to read, or to write in rime
The woe of these women that dwell in cottages,

And of many other men, that much woe suffer,
With both famine and thirst; yet they put on a bold face,
And are ashamed to beg or to show their need.

The poem is so full of attacks upon the ecclesiastical system of the time that Langland has sometimes been called a Lollard, but this is a mistake. He was bitter against the abuses, but loyal to the essential doctrines of Romanism. In the twentieth *passus* Piers is tending a wounded man (that is, a sinner) whom Faith and Hope have forsaken:

"Do not blame them," said Piers; "their presence would not avail,
Nor any medicine on earth, to heal the man.
Without the blood of a babe he may not be saved,
And that babe must needs be born of a maid;
With the blood of that babe he must be anointed and baptized.
And though he step and stand, he shall never be right strong
Till he have eaten that babe and drunk his blood."

Langland lived to be an old man, and his whole life, apparently, was dedicated to work upon this poem. He gave it to the world first in a shorter form, but afterwards, at intervals, issued two altered and expanded editions. No money was to be won by such labors, and Langland's satire upon the clergy must have deprived him of all chance of promotion in the church. The poem must, therefore, have been entirely a labor of love and conscience.

**36. Gower.** — The most celebrated of the poets contemporary with Chaucer was John Gower. His celeb-

rity, however, was not due to his genius, for his gift was less than that of either Langland or the author of *Gawayne and the Green Knight;* it was due chiefly to the fact that he wrote in the East Midland dialect, and therefore could be read with ease after his greater contemporaries had become wholly unintelligible. Moreover, he was a courtier and a polished gentleman, and therefore was able to write the sort of poetry that was then in fashion, if not actually to set the fashion himself. Consequently, it was for many generations a common thing to bracket his name with Chaucer's,[1] while his humble superiors were ignored.

Gower was born about the year 1325, and died in 1408. He was probably a rich man, and certainly a highly educated one. His three most considerable works are in three different languages; the *Vox Clamantis* in Latin, the *Speculum Meditantis* in French, and the *Confessio Amantis* in English. Apparently he wrote with the same ease in all three, although in one of his minor French poems he apologizes for slips:

> Al Université de tout le monde
> Johan Gower ceste balade envoie,
> Et si jeo nai de francois la faconde,
> Pardonetz moi qe jeo de ceo forsvoie.
> Jeo sui Englois. . . .[2]

[1] *E.g.*, Skelton, *Garlande of Laurell*, l. 387:

> And as I thus sadly amonge them avysid,
> I saw Gower, that first garnisshed our Englysshe rude,
> And Maister Chaucer, that nobly enterprysed
> How that our Englysshe myght fresshely be ennewed.

[2] "To the University of all the world John Gower sends this ballade; and if I have not a good French style, pardon my shortcomings; I am English."

And his Latin, of course, was neither elegant nor rect; but that was less his own fault than the hab his time, for Ciceronian Latin had long been forgot

The *Confessio Amantis* begins as follows:

Of hem that writen us to-fore
The bokes dwelle,[1] and we therfore
Ben taught of that was writen tho.[2]
Forthy[3] good is, that we also
In oure time amonge us here
Do write of-newe[4] some matere
Ensampled of[5] the olde wise,
So that it might in suche a wise,
Whan we be dede and elles-where,
Beleve[6] to the worldes ere
In time comend[7] after this.
But for men sain, and sothe it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To hem that shall it alday rede,
For thilke[8] cause, if that ye rede,
I wolde go the middel wey
And write a boke betwene the twey[9]
Somewhat of lust,[10] somewhat of lore,
That of the lasse or of the more
Som man may like of that I write,
And for that fewe men endite[11]
In our Englisshe, I thenke[12] make
A boke for king Richardes sake,
To whom belongeth my legeaunce
With all min hertes obeisaunce,
In all that ever a lege man
Unto his king may done or can.

[1] Are still extant. [2] then. [3] therefore. [4] anew. [5] mo upon. [6] remain. [7] coming. [8] that. [9] two. [10] ple [11] write. [12] intend to.

pursuance of this plan Gower has written a didactic ologue, in a thousand lines or more, to instruct the ader, while the rest of the poem, — some thirty or rty thousand lines, — is evidently intended to entertain m. The prologue is a criticism of the poet's own time, st as *Piers Plowman* is; but it is written in a politer ılect, in a metre which (under French influence) had gun to be something like that of modern poets, and ɔm the point of view of a courtier, scholar, and landed oprietor. Gower laments the corruption and decay of e church, which

> Causeth for to bringe
> This newe secte of lollardie
> And also many an heresie
> Among the clerkes in hem selve.

e inveighs especially against the ambition and avarice ıich he says have driven out the simple humility and arity of the olden time, and urges that there can be no ɔpe for the world so long as the whole human race is vided against itself. Gower was an earnest and fearless inker, and however flippantly we may speak of him as poet, he is entitled to high esteem as a man, and as a ɔber student of his times. Chaucer, in dedicating his *roilus and Criseyde*, said:

> O *moral* Gower, this book I directe
> To thee;

ıd the epithet has clung to Gower's name ever since.

The rest of the *Confessio Amantis* is a tediously typi- ıl illustration of the influence of the French literature f chivalry. The poet represents himself as a faithful

though not faultless servant of Love, coming to the court of Venus and praying for relief. Venus appoints a person called Genius to be his father confessor, and the poet kneels to him as a sinner to a priest of the church. Genius asks him searching questions about his offenses against the laws of Love, and tells a long story to illustrate the importance of each law. The telling of these stories is of course the main purpose of the poem, but the whole collection is unified by the setting. The court of Venus and Cupid, the laws of Love, the penitent offender against those laws, and most of the rest of the "machinery" of the poem were common conventions in French poetry and (as we shall see in a later chapter) were destined to become common enough in England.

A single example of Gower's method will suffice. Disobedience, which springs from pride, is one of the common offenses against the law. The confessor explains what it is, the lover confesses his guilt, and the confessor illustrates by the following story the advantages of obedience and humility:

There was once a worthy knight, Florent, a nephew of the Emperor. This knight had once killed a certain Branchus, and the friends of the latter waylaid Florent and took him to their castle as a prisoner. There the grandmother of Branchus came to him and offered him his liberty on this condition, that by a certain day he should bring her the answer to a question which she would put to him; he must freely agree, however, that in the event of his failure they might put him to death. Florent agreed, and the question was put: "what do all women most desire?"

Florent went home and tried in vain to get a satisfactory answer. At the time appointed he was returning to his death, when there met him a hideously loathsome old woman, who promised to save him on condition that he would marry her. Reluctantly he assented, for life is sweet, and he thought he could hide her where no man should see her, and she must soon die. So she told him the right answer to the question, which was, "to be sovereign of man's love." The answer was accepted by the household of Branchus, and Florent was set free; and being an honorable knight, he kept his word to the hag. After the ceremony, they retired together for the night, but Florent persistently turned his back on his wife, in disgust and despair. At last, in obedience to her urgent entreaty, he looked at her, and found her only eighteen years old, and the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. As he started to embrace her, she checked him, and asked whether he preferred thenceforth to have her young and beautiful by day, or by night; for he must choose between the two. He begged her to choose for him, saying she was his mistress and he put himself entirely under her direction. At that she assured him that she would keep her youth and beauty at all times. She explained that she was a king's daughter, and that her stepmother, by a wicked enchantment, had doomed her to endure the loathsome disguise of a hag until she should win the love and sovereignty of the most famous knight in the world; which she had now done.

This story, like many others in the poem, is good in itself; but it owes nothing to Gower's telling. He is destitute of the charm that we look for in a poet, and is insufferably prolix. Even by the few lines that have been quoted from the prologue, the reader can see that thirty thousand lines of Gower are too much.

# CHAPTER VII

## CHAUCER

**37. The Life of Chaucer.** — Geoffrey Chaucer was the son of John Chaucer, a London vintner. The date of his birth is unknown. In certain documents relating to a legal proceeding in which the poet's father was concerned, John Chaucer was described as being in 1324 not yet fourteen years of age, and as being in 1328 still unmarried. These facts fix the earliest limit that can possibly be considered for the date of the poet's birth. A later limit is suggested by some legal proceedings in 1386, in which he is described as "of the age of forty years and more." If this was correct, and if the phrase (like "forty odd") means "more than forty and less than fifty," then Chaucer could not have been born before 1336. On the other hand, the later facts of Chaucer's life, and many remarks in his poems about his old age, tempt us to assign as early a date as possible for his birth. It cannot have been much later than 1336, and it may have been a little earlier.

The earliest known mention of the poet is dated 1357. It is found in the household accounts of the wife of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, one of the sons of Edward III. These accounts had been used to bind a manuscript of some fifteenth-century poems, and were only recently discovered in the British Museum. They show,

among other things, that in April, 1357, the Countess spent seven shillings for a suit of clothes for Geoffrey Chaucer. This, with other evidence of similar character, shows that the poet was in his youth in the service of Lionel's family, doubtless as a page. Such a position was not of a menial nature. It was one which might well be coveted by a gentleman's son, and it secured for Chaucer a gentleman's education and training.

A little later the royal accounts show that Chaucer served in the wars in France and was taken prisoner, for the king paid something for his ransom. Still later, other documents show that pensions were paid to him, sometimes in money, sometimes in allowances of wine from the royal cellars. As he rose in the world he was found to be a man of skill and judgment in diplomacy, and was sent on several important missions to France and to Italy. He also held offices of trust and dignity at home. For twelve years he was Controller of the Customs at the port of London; he was a member of Parliament in 1386; was Clerk of the King's Works in 1389; and was a forester of the Earl of March in 1390. He was married and had at least one son. He had his ups and downs in worldly prosperity, however, according to the capricious chances of royal favor; but he was a man of eminent attainments apart from literature, and his character won the affectionate regard of many of his contemporaries. He died in 1400.

The foregoing are by no means all the known facts of Chaucer's life, but they will serve to illustrate the ways by which scholars have obtained information about him, and to explain his position in the history of mediæval

literature. With the greatest literary genius that England had yet produced, and the life and environment that fell to Chaucer's lot, his literary position seems one that might in great part have been predicted. He saw the same world that Langland saw, but from a very different point of view. He was familiar with the dreams of the romancers as well as with those of the religious mystics, but he was a sagacious man of the world, with a practical business sense. He loved a good story — loved it all the better, perhaps, if it was touched with the satirical spirit of the popular *fabliaux;* but his court training tended to make him one of the aristocrats of literary art, and his travels in Italy taught him whatever it was possible to learn of literary finish, in the land where the Renaissance was already in progress.

**38. Chaucer's French Period.** — We have seen in an earlier chapter how some of the mediæval romancers infused into their fantasies some of the spirit of mediæval religion. There was another kind of romantic poetry which owed much to the influence of religious literature, but in a different way. It will be remembered that one peculiar manifestation of the mediæval religious spirit was a fancy for detecting in things material an image of things spiritual. This fancy led to a profusion of allegorical religious literature, of which the *Bestiary* is a crude example, and *Pearl* a much finer one; but a similar fancy also took hold of the courtly romancers, and led to the sort of poetry commonly called "court allegory." This literary species can best be illustrated by an abstract of part of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, a French poem of the thirteenth century.

The poet has a dream in which, walking along a river-bank in the month of May, he comes upon a beautiful garden surrounded by a high wall. On the outside of this wall are paintings and sculptures representing such persons as Churlishness, Sorrow, Age, and Poverty. (As the garden is Love's domain, the fact that these figures are on the *outside* seems to indicate that romantic love is an entertainment for only those who are well-born, happy, young, and rich.) The poet at last finds a gate kept by the porter Idleness, who opens for him. In the garden is the God of Love, with his attendant lords and ladies, Beauty, Riches, Gladness, Courtesy, and many others. The poet avoids them for a time, and wanders about the garden till he comes to a beautiful rose-bush. One of the roses on this bush attracts him so that he cannot leave the place, but lingers there smelling of it and longing to pluck it; and while he is so engaged, Love (who has been watching him all the time) shoots his arrows at him, and demands his surrender. The poet thereupon kneels before the god with joined hands, and does him homage and becomes his "man." Love demands security, and the poet offers his heart, which the god accepts and locks up with a little golden key. He then delivers to the poet a long lecture on the statute laws of his kingdom, which are a codification of the whole duty of lovers. The lover must be lean and languishing, must be sleepless with love-longing, courteous of speech, reticent about his love, except with some trustworthy confidant, untiring in his devotion, liberal with gifts, and so forth; but there is nothing in the statutes to suggest that he ought to be pure of heart. After the lecture the poet was free to approach the rose-bush if he could, but there were difficulties in the way. Fair Reception, Pity, Frankness, and others, tried to encourage and help him, but Reason, Shame, Chastity, and other malignant enemies of Love, conspired to keep him away. Some of them built a high wall around the rose-bush; and the

rest of the poem is a narrative of the poet's long frustrated efforts to pluck the rose.

This poem is dainty in treatment, with every appearance of earnest devotion, on the part of the author, to the god of his idolatry; but from the foregoing abstract, and from what has been said of the early romances of chivalry, it will be evident that it was really written in a spirit of elegant trifling, and that its fundamental conception of life was thoroughly immoral. It was one of the most popular books known in the fourteenth century. One of Chaucer's first works was a translation of it, and we find evidences of its influence upon almost all Chaucer's contemporaries. Even in *Pearl* the bereaved father falls asleep and dreams that he is walking along a river. It was therefore not strange that Chaucer's earliest original poetry should bear the same stamp. But while Chaucer imitates the allegorical form of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, with its numberless personifications, its dream device, its affectation of devotion to Love and his laws, its conventional background of riverside, May-time, and the song of the birds, and all the rest of the "machinery" of the poem, he nevertheless maintains toward the idea of love, or whatever happens to be his subject, an attitude of healthy common sense. He is sometimes coarse; but he did not wrap up sensuality in a thin veil of mysticism, and he is often least immoral where he is most indelicate.

Two of Chaucer's minor poems, the *Complaint to Pity*, and the *Book of the Duchess*, may be mentioned as illustrating his French period. The former expresses the sorrows of an unsuccessful lover, in the conventional

French way. The lover is described as one who has long sought Pity, for the purpose of presenting to her a bill of complaint against Cruelty; as if Pity held a court of justice, in which the malicious enemies of Love might be brought to trial. He finds that Pity is dead, and his suit is therefore vain. The *Book of the Duchess* is a lament for the death of the Duchess Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt. Chaucer describes himself as falling asleep over a book, and dreaming that he lies in bed on a May morning, listening to the song of the birds. He gets up and walks out into the woods. There he finds a man dressed in black (evidently John of Gaunt) who tells him the story of his love, his wooing, and his bereavement. At the end of the recital the poet wakes, and finds himself lying in his room with the book in his hand. The widower's story is told in the French manner, with a number of actual borrowings from the *Romaunt of the Rose;* but it is wedded love that is celebrated, and the moral spirit of the poem owes nothing to the school of Chrestien of Troyes.

**39. Chaucer's Later Poems.** — Chaucer's French period is usually said to have been followed by an Italian period, and this in turn by an English period; but the value of this triple distinction is questionable. His later works, composed after he had traveled in Italy and become acquainted with the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, show a newly awakened genius for story-telling, for the portrayal of character, for the observation and realistic description of all phases of life, — and in short for most of the essentials of poetry. Some of his later poems are more directly traceable than others to

Italian influence; but the vital fact about them all is that they were comparatively free from the influence of French literature, and as Chaucer escaped from that influence he was escaping from the shackles of mediævalism.

His longest single poem, *Troilus and Cressida*, is commonly counted as belonging to his Italian period, and it was indeed based upon a poem of Boccaccio; but Chaucer's treatment of the old story is as thoroughly English, and as thoroughly his own, as most of his later work. The story is of the Trojan hero's love for the faithless Cressida, who swears eternal fidelity, but soon deserts him for the Greek Diomed. The love of Troilus is intense and largely animal, like the love of heroes in the older romances, and Cressida's acceptance of it is after the old romantic pattern, furtive and dishonorable; but Chaucer presents things as they are, sometimes with brutal frankness, but never with any obliquity of moral vision. In a typical French romance the heroine is wooed, and after long-continued coyness relents; in Chaucer's poem she is tempted, and after some resistance falls. Moreover, the actions of both hero and heroine are always prompted by intelligible motives. They are a man and a woman, not puppets of romance.

The *Legend of Good Women* is an excellent instance of Chaucer's new way of using old material. It is a collection of tales from classical mythology, introduced by a prologue in something like the French manner; but both the prologue and the tales themselves are stamped with Chaucer's individual imprint. The prologue tells how Chaucer, after a ramble through the fields on a beautiful day in May, fell asleep in an arbor, and dreamed

that he was walking in a meadow and listening to the song of the birds. The God of Love came up, leading by the hand Alcestis, the pattern of wifely virtue and devotion. The god addresses Chaucer wrathfully, for (he says) the poet has translated the *Romaunt of the Rose* and written the story of Cressida, and both these works tend to make men think lightly of Love and of his law.[1] Why could he not have written of some good woman, instead of the false and wicked ones? The god seems disposed to deal harshly with the poet, but Alcestis graciously intercedes for him and obtains his pardon. The pardon, however, is granted only on condition of his now writing a book about women who, whether wives or maidens, have shown lifelong devotion and fidelity. The poet wakes and proceeds to perform the condition.

One curious instance of Chaucer's common-sense realism, from the body of the *Legend*, may serve as a typical specimen. He is telling the story of Dido. In Vergil's *Æneid*, when the faithful Achates was sent to the fleet for young Ascanius, Venus induced her son to take the boy's place; and thus Cupid was enabled to instil his poison into the breasts of Æneas and Dido. Here is Chaucer's version:

> Repairèd is this Achates again,
> And Eneas ful blisful is and fain
> To seen his yongè sone Ascanius.
> But natheless, our autour telleth us
> That Cupido, that is the god of love,
> At preyere of his moder, hye above,

[1] So far as the *Romaunt of the Rose* is concerned, this refers to parts of the poem not covered by the abstract in the preceding section.

Hadde the lyknes of the child y-take,[1]
This noble quene enamourèd to make
On Eneas; but, as of that scripture,
Be as be may, I make of hit no cure.

The last lines mean, "as for that version, be as be may, I care not for it;" and accordingly the story proceeds on the assumption that the boy who came to Dido's arms was really Ascanius.

**40. The Canterbury Tales.** — As Chaucer grew older, his humor and his poetic genius seemed to develop steadily. After completing eight tales for the *Legend of Good Women*, he left the work unfinished and devoted himself to the *Canterbury Tales;* and it is easy to see why he did so. The latter work was also a collection of stories introduced by a prologue, but the scheme of the work was much better suited to the poet's ripened powers than was that of the *Legend.* In the prologue of the later work Chaucer presents a company of pilgrims, drawn from all classes in society, meeting by chance at an inn on the road to Canterbury, and making their pilgrimage to the shrine together. To relieve the journey, they agree to tell stories on the way. The Prologue describes the pilgrims at the inn, and starts them on their way to Canterbury; and the tales follow, each told by some member of the company. This scheme brought all Chaucer's powers into play. One of the pilgrims is a knight, and his story is naturally a romance of chivalry; another is a nun, who tells the legend of a saint, full of the spirit of mediæval asceticism; another is a hearty young priest, who tells a tale of the Cock and the Fox

[1] taken.

in the spirit of the early Reynard romances; a brawny, brutish miller tells a comic and scurrilous *fabliau;* and, in general, as all sorts of men and women are introduced in the Prologue, so the Tales themselves present all kinds of subjects, from love to war and from earth to heaven.

There is much trenchant satire in Chaucer's characterizations. He is as severe as Langland upon the abuses that were common in the church, but his method is very different from Langland's. The latter, for example, keeps attacking the four orders of friars, exposing their wickedness and declaiming against it and them; Chaucer's way is rather to present an individual friar, and make him appear both odious and ridiculous. His satire is personal where Langland's is institutional. He hated the friars more because they were contemptible men than because they were a menace to society. He was a literary artist, not a reformer. An excellent specimen of his method is found in the *Summoner's Tale,* which tells how a friar on his begging rounds came to a hospitable house where he had often before had filling dinners and ogled the good man's wife.

So long he wentè, hous by hous, til he
Cam til an hous ther he was wont to be
Refresshèd moore than in an hundred placis;
Syk lay the goodè man whos that the place is;
Bedrede[1] upon a couchè lowe he lay.
"*Deus hic!*" quod he, "O Thomas, freend, good day!"
Seydè this frerè, curteisly and softe.
"Thomas," quod he, "God yeldè[2] yow! ful ofte
Have I upon this bench faren ful weel;

[1] bedridden. [2] reward.

Heere have I eten many a myrie meel;"
*And fro the bench he droof awey the cat,*
And leyde adoun his potente[1] and his hat,
And eek his scrippe, and sette hym softe adoun.

Chaucer's best comic creation is the Wife of Bath. She is middle-aged, stout, and jovially healthy, and wins ready forgiveness for most of her shortcomings by her breezy frankness in confessing them. Before she begins her tale she gives the company a garrulous sketch of her own life, and even Shakespeare's Falstaff could hardly reveal himself better. Some extracts from her discourse will perhaps give a fairer impression of Chaucer's versatility than any other single passage could give. It must be remembered, however, that a great poet is fully known only when all his works are read. Chaucer's tragic power, for example, is hardly suggested in the excerpts which follow.

Chaucer's pronunciation was very different from ours, and the melody of his verse, which is often exquisite, cannot be appreciated without a knowledge of at least one of the differences. In the following extracts a grave accent is used where the letter *e* (now silent) had in Chaucer's speech a syllabic value. The word "tellè," for example, should have the final vowel lightly sounded, somewhat like the *a* in "Ella." The presence in Chaucer's language of a great number of words with the letter *e* thus pronounced enabled the poet to secure a certain fluency of style which is now almost impossible. A striking illustration of this fact may be seen in Chaucer's line:

As thikke as motès in the sonnè-beem.

[1] staff.

wo later poets imitated this line. Milton wrote:

As the gay motes that people the sun-beams;

d Dryden wrote:

Thick as the motes that twinkle in the sun.

It is clear that Middle English was somewhat inferior our modern speech in terseness and vigor. It is sier for us to write compactly than it was for Chau-r; but it was easier for him to write with a melodious ency.

(*The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe.*)

. . . . . .

Now, sire, now wol I tellè forth my tale.
As evere moote I drinken wyn or ale,
I shal seye sooth of housbondes that I hadde,
As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.

. . . . . .

But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
It tikleth me aboute myn hertè[1] roote!
Unto this day it dooth myn hertè boote[2]
That I have had my world, as in my time.
But Age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith, —
Lat go, fare wel, the devel go therwith!
The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle,
The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.[3]
Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.

. . . . . .

[1] heart's. [2] good. [3] try.

He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem,
And lith y-grave [1] under the roodè-beem,[2]
Al [3] is his tombè noght so curyus [4]
As was the sepulcre of hym Daryus,
Which that Apelles wroghtè subtilly;
It nys but wast to burye hym preciously.
Lat hym fare wel, God geve his soulè reste,
He is now in his grave and in his cheste!
Now of my fifthe housbondè wol I telle.
God lete hise soulè nevere come in helle!
And yet was he to me the moostè shrewe;[5]
That feel I on my ribbes al-by-rewe.[6]

. . . . . .

[But] thogh he hadde me bet [7] on every bon,
He koudè wynne agayn my love anon.
I trowe I loved hym bestè for that he
Was of his lovè daungerous [8] to me.
We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
In this matere a queyntè fantasye;
Waytè! what thing we may nat lightly have,
Ther after wol we crie al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
Preesse on us faste and thannè wol we fle.

. . . . . .

My fifthe housbondè, God his soulè blesse!
Which that I took for love, and no richesse,
He somtyme was a clerk of Oxenford,
And hadde left scole and wente at hom to bord
With my gossib,[9] dwellynge in ourè toun;
God have hir soule, hir name was Alisoun.
She knew my herte, and eek my privetee,
Bet [10] than oure parisshe preest, as moot I thee.[11]

. . . . . .

[1] buried. [2] beam bearing a crucifix, in church. [3] although. [4] elaborate. [5] ill-natured. [6] all in a row. [7] beaten. [8] niggardly, undemonstrative. [9] crony. [10] better. [11] thrive.

And so bifel that onès in a Lente,
So often tymes I to my gossyb wente, —
For evere yet I lovèd to be gay,
And for to walke in March, Averill and May,
Fro hous to hous to heerè sondry talys, —
That Jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame Alys
And I myself into the feeldès wente.
Myn housbonde was at London al that Lente;
I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye,
And for to se, and eek for to be seye[1]
Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace
Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
Therfore I made my visitaciouns
To vigilies[2] and to processiouns,
To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,
To pleyes of myracles, and to marïages,
And wered upon my gayè scarlet gytes.[3]
Thise wormès, ne thise motthès, ne thise mytes
Upon my peril frete[4] hem never-a-deel.[5]
And wostow[6] why? For they were usèd weel.
Now wol I tellen forth what happèd me.
I seye that in the feeldès walkèd we,
Till trewèly we hadde swich daliaunce,
This clerk and I, that of my purveiance[7]
I spak to hym, and seyde hym how that he,
If I were wydwè, sholdè weddè me;
For certeinly, — I sey for no bobance,[8] —
Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance
Of marïage, nof othere thyngès eek.
I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
That hath but oon hole for to stertè to,
And if that faillè thanne is al y-do.
I bar hym on honde[9] he hadde enchanted me, —

[1] seen. [2] wakes. [3] stockings (or perhaps petticoats). [4] eat. [5] not at all. [6] knowest thou. [7] *i.e.*, by way of provision for the future. [8] boast. [9] accused him.

My damè taughtè me that soutiltee,[1] —
And eek I seyde, I mette[2] of hym al nyght,
He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,[3]
And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
But yet I hope that he shal do me good,
For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught;
And al was fals, I dremed of it right naught,
But I folwed ay my damès loore,
As wel of this as of othere thyngès moore.
But now, sire, — lat me se, — what I shal seyn?
A ha! by God, I have my tale ageyn.
Whan that my fourthe housbondè was on beere[4]
I weepte algate[5] and madè sory cheere,
As wyvès mooten,[6] for it is usage,
And with my coverchief covered my visage;
But, for that I was purveyed of a make,[7]
I wepte but smal, and that I undertake!
To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe[8]
With neighèbores, that for hym maden sorwe,
And Jankyn, ourè clerk, was oon of tho.
As help me God, whan that I saugh hym go
After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
Of leggès and of feet so clene and faire,
That al myn herte I gaf unto his hoold.

. . . . . .

What sholde I seye, but at the monthès ende
This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,[9]
Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee,
And to hym gaf I all the lond and fee,
That evere was me geven ther-bifoore;
But afterward repented me ful soore.
He noldè suffre nothyng of my list;
By God, he smoot me onès on the lyst,[10]

[1] subtilty. [2] dreamed. [3] on my back. [4] bier. [5] to be sure. [6] must. [7] spouse. [8] on the morrow. [9] agreeable. [10] ear.

For that I rente out of his book a leef,
That of the strook myn erè wax al deef.
. . . . . .

But now to purpos why I toldè thee
That I was beten for a book, *pardee.*
Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,
Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse
Was al mankyndè broght to wrecchednesse;
For which that Jesus Crist hymself was slayn,
That boghte us with his hertè blood agayn.
Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde,
That womman was the los of al mankynde.
Tho redde he me how Sampson loste hise heres;
Slepynge, his lemman[1] kitte it with hir sheres;
Thurgh which tresoun loste he bothe hise eyen.
Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,
Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,
That causèd hym to sette hymself afyre.
. . . . . .

And whan I saugh he woldè nevere fyne[2]
To reden on this cursèd book al nyght,
Al sodeynly thre levès have I plyght[3]
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took hym on the cheke,
That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun;
And he up stirte as dooth a wood[4] leoun,
And with his fest he smoot me on the heed,
That in the floor I lay as I were deed;
And whan he saugh how stillè that I lay,
He was agast and wolde han fled his way,
Til attè[5] laste out of my swogh I breyde.[6]
"O hastow slayn me, falsè theef?" I seyde;
"And for my land thus hastow mordred me?

[1] sweetheart. [2] cease. [3] plucked. [4] mad. [5] at the. [6] awoke.

Er I be deed, yet wol I kissè thee."
And neer he cam, and knelèd faire adoun,
And seydè, "Deerè suster Alisoun!
As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte.
That I have doon it is thyself to wyte,[1]
Forgeve it me, and that I thee biseke;"
And yet, eft-soones, I hitte hym on the cheke,
And seydè, "Theef! thus muchel am I wreke.[2]
Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke."
But attè laste, with muchel care and wo,
We fille acorded by us selven two.
He gaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge, and of his hond also,
And made hym brenne his book anon right tho;
And whan that I hadde geten unto me
By maistrie al the sovèraynètee, —
And that he seyde, "Myn owene trewè wyf,
Do as thee lust to terme[3] of al thy lyf;
Keepe thyn honour, and keepe eek myn estaat," —
After that day we hadden never debaat.
God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
And also trewe, and so was he to me.
I prey to God, that sit in magestee,
So blesse his soulè for his mercy deere.
Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere.

The Frerè lough[4] whan he hadde herd al this;
"Now, dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,
This is a long preamble of a tale."
And whan the Somonour[5] herde the Frerè gale,
"Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddès armès two!
A frere wol entremette[6] him evere-mo.

[1] blame. [2] avenged. [3] the end. [4] laughed. [5] Summoner, a kind of bailiff. [6] intrude.

Lo, goodè men, a flye, and eek a frere,
Wol falle in every dysshe and eek mateere.
What spekestow of 'preambulacioun'?
What? amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun!
Thou lettest[1] oure disport in this manere."
"Ye, woltow so, sire Somonour?" quod the Frere;
"Now, by my feith! I shal, er that I go,
Telle of a somonour swich a tale or two
That alle the folk shal laughen in this place."
"Now, ellès, Frerè, I bishrewe thy face!"
Quod this Somonour, "and I bishrewè me
But if I tellè talès, two or thre,
Of frerès, er I come to Sidyngborne,
That I shal make thyn hertè for to morne,
For wel I woot thy pacience is gon."
Our Hoostè cridè, "Pees! and that anon;"
And seydè, "Lat the womman telle hire tale;
Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.
Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best."
"Al redy, sire," quod she, "right as yow lest;
If I have licence of this worthy Frere."
"Yis, dame," quod he, "tel forth, and I wol heere."

*Here endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe and bigynneth hir tale.*

In tholdè dayès of the Kyng Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
All was this land fulfild of faïrye.[2]
The elf queene with hir joly compaignye
Dauncèd ful ofte in many a grenè mede.
This was the olde opinion as I rede, —
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago, —
But now kan no man se none elvès mo,
For now the gretè charitee and prayeres

[1] hinderest. [2] troops of fairies.

Of lymytours,[1] and othere hooly freres,
That serchen every lond and every streem,
As thikke as motès in the sonnè beem, —
Blessynge hallès, chambres, kichenes, boures,
Citees, burghes, castels, hyè toures,
Thropès,[2] bernes, shipnes,[3] dayeryes, —
This maketh that ther been no faïryes;
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself,
In undermelès[4] and in morwenynges,
And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges
As he gooth in his lymytacioun.[5]
Wommen may go saufly up and doun;
In every bussh or under every tree,
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem non dishonour.

(The tale then tells how one of Arthur's knights, being under sentence of death for a violent crime, was promised his liberty if he would, within a twelvemonth and a day, tell the queen what thing it is that women most desire. He sought everywhere for an answer, and was returning to his death when he met an ugly old woman who agreed to save him, on his promise to marry her. She prompted him to tell the queen that women most desire sovereignty over their husbands. The answer was accepted, and he married the old woman. When they were left alone, after the ceremony, he turned his back upon her in disgust. She pleads with him.)

"What is my guilt? For Goddès love, tel it,
And it shal been amended, if I may."
"Amended!" quod this knight, "allas! nay, nay!
It wol nat been amended nevere mo,
Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,

[1] licensed begging friars. [2] villages. [3] stables. [4] afternoons (?). [5] limits within which he may beg, etc.

And ther-to comen of so lough a kynde,
That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.[1]
So, woldè God! myn hertè woldè breste!"
"Is this," quod she, "the cause of youre unreste?"
"Ye, certeinly," quod he, "no wonder is."
"Now, sire," quod she, "I koude amende al this,
If that me liste, er it were dayès thre;
So wel ye myghtè bere yow unto me.
But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
Swich arrogancè is nat worth an hen.
Looke, who that is moost vertuous alway,
Pryvee[2] and apert,[3] and moost entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedès that he kan,
Tak hym for the grettest gentil man.
Crist wole we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse;
For, thogh they geve us al hir heritage, —
For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,[4] —
Yet may they nat biquethè for no thyng,
To noon of us, hir vertuous lyvyng,
That made hem gentil men y-called be,
And bad us folwen[5] hem in swich degree.

(She adds that, so far as his objection relates to her e and ugliness, he ought to be well pleased, for a young d beautiful wife might give him much trouble by her ghtiness.)

"But nathèless, syn I knowe youre delit,
I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.
Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thyngès tweye:
To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewè, humble wyf,
And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;

[1] writhe and turn. [2] secret. [3] open. [4] dignity. [5] follow.

Or ellès ye wol han me yong and fair,
And take youre áventure of the repair
That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,
Or in som oother placè may wel be;
Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh."
This knyght avyseth hym and sorè siketh;[1]
But attè laste he seyde in this manere;
"My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I put me in youre wisè governance;
Cheeseth youre self which may be moost plesance,
And moost honour to yow and me also;
I do no fors[2] the wheither of the two,
For as yow liketh it suffiseth me."
"Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie," quod she,
"Syn I may chese, and governe as me lest?"
"Ye, certès, wyf," quod he, "I holde it best."
"Kys me," quod she, "we be no lenger wrothe,
For by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe, —
This is to seyn, ye, bothè fair and good.
I prey to God that I moote sterven[3] wood,[4]
But[5] I to yow be al so good and trewe,
As evere was wyf syn that the world was newe;
And but I be to-morn as fair to seene
As any lady, emperice, or queene,
That is bitwixe the est and eek the west,
Dooth with my lyf and deth right as you lest.
Cast up the curtyn, — looke, how that it is."
And whan the knyght saugh verraily al this,
That she so fair was, and so yong ther-to,
For joye he hente hire in hise armès two,
His hertè bathèd in a bath of blisse;
A thousand tyme arewe he gan hire kisse,
And she obeyèd hym in every thyng
That myghtè doon hym plesance or likyng.

[1] sigheth. [2] *i.e.*, I care not. [3] die. [4] mad. [5] unless.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

**41. The Chaucerian School.** — During a great part of the fifteenth century England was at war either with France or within her own borders. The time was not favorable to literature, but it was by no means so barren as most historians represent it. No long poem of the highest grade was produced, and the poets whose names are best known, such as Lydgate and Occleve, were poor ones; but there were many poets of less repute who did pleasing and graceful work, and there was one great master of prose, Sir Thomas Malory.

About forty of the minor poems of this period were formerly attributed to Chaucer, and many of them are to be found in the older editions of his works. It is easy for modern scholars to see, by linguistic evidence, that they must have been written by other persons; but a superficial resemblance to some of Chaucer's work was enough to deceive the earlier editors. Thus the achievement of Chaucer was exaggerated by many thousand lines, and the credit of the fifteenth century correspondingly diminished, on the principle that unto him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

One obvious reason for this mistake is the fact that many of the fifteenth-century poets purposely imitated

Chaucer. They felt his greatness and cordially acknowledged it. Occleve, for example, has the following lines in the prologue of his principal poem:

O maister dere and fader reverent,
My maister Chaucer! floure of eloquence,
Mirrour of fructuous entendement,
O universal fadir in science,
Allas! that thou thyne excellent prudence
In thy bedde mortell myghtest not bequethè;
What eylèd Dethe? allas! why wold he sle thee?

O Dethe, that didest not harme singulere
In slaughtre of hym, but alle this lond it smerteth;
But natheless yit hast thow no powere
His name to slee; his hye vertu asterteth
Unslayne fro thee, whiche ay us lyfly herteth[1]
With bookès of his ornat endityng,
That is to alle this londe enlumynyng.

And about the middle of the century the Scotch poet, Henryson, in the prologue of his *Testament of Cresseid*, explains how he happened to light upon his subject:

I mend[2] the fire, and beikit[3] me about,
Than tuik a drink my spreitis[4] to comfort,
And armit me weill fra the cauld thairout;
To cut the winter nicht and mak it schort,
I tuik ane Quair,[5] and left all uther sport,
Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious
Of fair Cresseid and lusty Troïlus.

Such references to Chaucer were very common. Imitations of him, often unavowed, but none the less obvious, were still commoner. As we find, however, that Gower

[1] encourages. [2] mended. [3] bustled. [4] spirits. [5] quire, book.

was praised in terms only less high, we feel cautious about crediting the age with fine literary discrimination; and we are not surprised to find that most of the imitations were far inferior to the model. The later poets seem indeed to have imitated those elements in Chaucer which were least worth imitating. They followed him where he was following mediæval fashions, but they were unable even to enter upon the paths that he had struck out for himself. Consequently we find hundreds of lines of chivalrous romance and allegory, with the little birds singing in the May-time and the poets falling asleep to dream of the god of love; but seldom do we find the strain of feeling that made Chaucer's mediævalism modern, or the touch of his masterful style.

**42. The Kingis Quair and the Court of Love.** — King James the First of Scotland was captured in his boyhood by the English, and grew up in England a prisoner. One of the best poems of the Chaucerian school, *The Kingis Quair* (King's Book), which purports to have been (and perhaps actually was) written by him, tells that during his captivity he saw from his prison window the beautiful Joan Beaufort walking in the castle garden below, and immediately his whole heart became hers. The poet uses the machinery of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, telling us that while the lady walked there the birds all sang a happy chorus, and when she went away he fell asleep and dreamed that he was transported to the court of Love, where he prayed to Cupid and his mother for aid in his extremity. It is easy to see, however, that this poet treats the old material in a new spirit of sincere fervor. The love that he was celebrating was honest

and genuine, and the quaint symbolism that he borrowed for it from the older poets had for him a deeper meaning than it had for them. Venus told him, in his dream, that he must go to Minerva for counsel, and the latter, after saying that there were different ways of loving, explained her meaning as follows:

Lo, my gude sone, this is als mich to seyne,
As, gif[1] thy lufè sett[2] all utterly
Of nycè lust,[3] thy travail is in veyne;
And so the end sall turne of thy folye
To payne and repentance; lo, wate thou quhy?[4]
Gif the[5] ne list on lufe thy vertew set,
Vertu sall be the cause of thy forfet.[6]

Tak him[7] before in all thy governance,
That in his hand the stere[8] has of ȝou all,
And pray unto his hyè purveyance,
Thy lufe to gye,[9] and on him traist and call,
That corner-stone and ground is of the wall,
That failis noght, and trust, withoutin drede,
Unto thy purpose sone he sall the lede.
. . . . . .

Be trewe, and meke, and stedfast in thy thoght,
And diligent hir merci to procure,
Noght onely in thy word; for word is noght,
Bot gif[10] thy werk and all thy besy cure
Accord thereto. . . .

The poet who wrote this was evidently something more than an imitator, and the following dedicatory stanza shows rather less discrimination than might have been expected of him.

[1] if. [2] depends. [3] on foolish desire. [4] knowest thou why? [5] thee. [6] downfall. [7] *i.e.*, God. [8] guidance. [9] guide. [10] but if = unless.

Unto the impnis[1] of my maisteris dere,
Gowere and chaucere, that on the steppis satt
Of rethorike, quhill[2] thai were lyvand here,
Superlative as poetis laureate
In moralitee and eloquence ornate,
I recommend my buk in lynis sevin,
And eke thair saulis unto the blisse of hevin. Amen.

*The Court of Love*, one of the poems formerly attrib-
ed to Chaucer, is made of the same old material as *The*
*ingis Quair*. The poet-lover tells us that he went to
e Court of Love when he was eighteen years of age,
d there at the king's command was instructed in the
ws of the realm. Twenty statutes are set forth in full
he found them in the statute-book; but it is clear,
om the way they are put, that this poet was reviving
e old forms from the *Romaunt of the Rose* merely in
spirit of levity. The god and his laws are no more
be taken seriously than the King's court in *Alice in*
*onderland*. Here are some of the statutes:

The eleventh statut; — Thy signes for to con[3]
With y and finger, and with smyles soft,
And low to cough, and alway for to shon,
For dred of spyes, for to winken oft:
But secretly to bring a sigh a-loft,
And eke beware of over-moch resort;[4]
For that, paraventure, spilleth al thy sport.

. . . . . .

The fifteenth statut; — Use to swere and stare,
And counterfet a lesing[5] hardely,
To save thy ladys honour every-where,
And put thyself to fight for her boldly:

[1] hymns, poems. [2] while. [3] know. [4] company. [5] falsehood.

Sey she is good, virtuous, and gostly,[1]
Clere of entent, and herte, and thought and wille;
And argue not, for reson ne for skille,

Agayn thy ladys plesir ne entent,
For love wil not be countrepleted, indede:
Sey as she seith, than shalt thou not be shent,[2]
"The crow is whyte; ye, truly, so I rede:"
And ay what thing that she thee will forbede,
Eschew all that, and give her sovereintee,
Her appetyt folow in all degree.

The poet of *The Kingis Quair* would hardly have admitted into his statute-book a law which recognized the necessity of lying to save the honor of one's lady. A little farther on in *The Court of Love* the author's comic and satiric purpose becomes yet more apparent. He says he read through all the statutes relating to men, with an officer of the court named Rigor watching him; and then,

I turned leves, loking on this boke,
Where other statuts were of women shene;[3]
And right furthwith Rigour on me gan loke
Full angrily, and seid unto the quene
I traitour was, and charged me let been:
"There may no man," quod he, "the statuts know,
That long to woman, hy degree ne low."

And at the end of the poem there is another touch of humor. We are told that it is May-day, and that the birds are singing psalms and anthems in the trees; the description of their chorus is prettily done; indeed it is one of the daintiest of all these ornithological passages;

[1] holy. [2] rejected. [3] fair.

but after all the other birds have had their turn, the cuckoo pipes up. He, it will be understood, is a bird of ill-omen to all true lovers.

> And furth the cokkow gan procede anon,
> With "*Benedictus*" thanking god in hast,
> That in this May wold visit thaim echon,
> And gladden thaim all whyl the fest shal last:
> And therewithall a-loughter out he brast,
> "I thank it god that I shuld end the song,
> And all the service which hath been so long."

It should be noted that while the author of *The Kingis Quair* and the author of *The Court of Love* seem men of radically different temperaments, they have this at least in common: they are not satisfied with the old hollow conventions of court allegory. They express their dissatisfaction in different ways, one by an attempt at radical reform, the other by a light-hearted parody. Each in his way was a sincerer artist than the original poet of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, for each was nearer to real life; though in the second of our two poets we find realism only in so far as he pricks the bubble of the conventional romance. His poem is to the true court allegory what the *fabliau* was to the romance.

All the poems thus far quoted in this chapter were written in a stanza-form known as the "rime royal," owing to its use by the author of *The Kingis Quair*. It had been a favorite stanza with Chaucer, appearing, for example, in *Troilus and Cressida*, and was naturally popular with his imitators.

**43. Maundevile's Travels.** — A remarkable book c travels, purporting to be by Sir John Maundevile, wa first published in French about 1360, and translated int English perhaps half a century later. The author wa probably John de Bourgogne; and certainly Maundevi himself, the traveler, was as purely a fictitious person a Gulliver or Robinson Crusoe. The book seems to hav been made up partly from the author's imagination an partly from the stories of earlier travelers, and it is witl out any value as a record of fact; but it is a very ente taining work, and is not without interest for the seriou student of mediæval thought. A few passages, selecte almost at random, will illustrate its character.

In Ethiope alle the ryveres and alle the watres be trouble, and thei ben somdelle salte, for the gret he that is there. And the folk of that contree ben lyght dronken, and han but litille appetyt to mete: and th lyven not longe. In Ethiope ben many dyverse folk: an Ethiope is clept Cusis. In that contree ben folk, that ha but o foot: and thei gon so fast that it is marvaylle: an the foot is so large that it schadewethe alle the body aȝe the sonne, whanne thei wole lye and reste hem. In Ethiop whan the children ben ȝonge and lytille, thei ben alle ȝelowe and whan that thei wexen of age, that ȝalownesse turneth to ben alle blak.

In passynge be the lond of Cathaye, toward the higl Ynde, and toward Bacharye, men passen be a kyngdo that men clepen Caldilhe: that is a fulle fair contree. An there growethe a maner of fruyt, as thoughe it were gowrdes: and whan thei ben rype, men kutten hem a t and men fynden with inne a lytylle best, in flessche, in bo and blode, as though it were a lytylle lomb, with oute

wolle. And men eten bothe the frut and the best: and that is a gret marveylle. Of that frute I have eten; alle thoughe it were wondirfulle: but that I knowe wel, that God is marveyllous in his werkes.

And alle be it that men fynden gode dyamandes in Ynde, ȝit natheless men fynden hem more comounly upon the roches in the see, and upon hilles where the myne of gold is. And thei growen many to gedre, on lytille, another gret. And ther ben sume of the gretnesse of a bene, and sume als grete as an haselle note. And thei ben square and poynted of here owne kynde, bothe aboven and benethen, with outen worchinge of mannes hond. And thei growen to gedre, male and femele. And thei ben norysscht with the dew of hevene. And thei engendren comounly, and bryngen forthe smale children, that multiplyen and growen alle the ȝeer. I have often tymes assayed, that ȝif a man kepe hem with a litylle of the roche, and wete hem with May dew ofte sithes, thei schulle growe everyche ȝeer; and the smale wole wexen grete. For righte as the fyn perl congelethe and wexethe gret of the dew of hevene, righte so dothe the verray dyamand: and righte as the perl of his owne kynde takethe roundnesse, righte so the dyamand, be vertu of God, takethe squarenesse. And men schalle bere the dyamaund on his left syde: for it is of grettere vertue thanne, than on the righte syde. For the strengthe of here growynge is toward the Northe, that is the left syde of the world; and the left parte of man is, whan he turnethe his face toward the Est.

Maundevile's natural philosophy is characteristic of his time. During the middle ages science not only made little progress; in some departments it actually lost ground. The reason for this is undoubtedly to be found chiefly in the character of mediæval religion.

Asceticism dominated the world of thought to such an extent that the best minds regarded mundane speculation as folly. Why should man waste time in observation of material phenomena, when so few years were allotted him to provide for the salvation of his soul? The conviction deepened that the Bible and the early fathers of the church were the sources of all useful knowledge; and so the habit grew, all through the middle ages, of deriving information not from nature but from old and approved authorities. "Major est scripturae auctoritas," wrote St. Augustine, "quam omnis humani ingenii capacitas;" and this was the golden text of all mediæval philosophy. When nature was studied at all, it was likely to be studied in a mystical spirit. The world was God's creation, the expression in matter of God's eternal mind; and the study of nature was thought profitable only because it was a way of contemplating Him. This mystical method destroyed science. When, for example, a learned man saw a flock of gulls fishing, he did not think of observing their habits; he thought only of the insatiate appetite of the devil for men's souls. The belief that the lion dragged dust after him with his tail, in order to hide his footsteps, was not questioned, for it was authorized by holy fathers and it symbolized the secret origin of our Saviour. Natural phenomena had a higher value than for laboratory purposes.

Nevertheless, Maundevile shows some glimmering comprehension of scientific method. The following extracts are far more advanced, in their scientific spirit, than the passage about diamonds.

In that lond, ne in many othere beȝonde that, no man may see the Sterre transmontane, that is clept the Sterre of the See, that is unmevable, and that is toward the Northe, that we clepen the Lode Sterre. But men seen another sterre, the contrarie to him, that is toward the Southe, that is clept Antartyk. . . . For whiche cause, men may wel perceyve that the lond and the see ben of rownde schapp and forme. For the partie of the firmament schewethe in o contree, that schewethe not in another contree. And men may well preven be experience and sotyle compassement of wytt, that ȝif a man fond passages be schippes, that wolde go to serchen the world, men myghte go be schippe alle aboute the world, and aboven and benethen. The whiche thing I prove thus, aftre that I have seyn. . . . I have gon toward the parties meridionales, that is toward the Southe, and I have founden that in Lybye men seen first the Sterre Antartyk. And so fer I have gon more forthe in tho contrees, that I have founde that sterre more highe; so that toward the highe Lybye it is 18 degrees of heghte and certeyn minutes (of the whiche, 60 minutes maken a degree). . . . Be the whiche I seye ȝou certeynly that men may envirowne alle the Erthe of alle the world, as wel undre as aboven, and turnen aȝen to his contree, that hadde companye and schippynge and conduyt. . . . Also ȝee have herd me seye that Jerusalem is in the myddes of the world; and that may men preven and schewen there be a spere, that is pighte in to the erthe, upon the hour of mydday, whan it is Equenoxium, that schewethe no schadwe on no syde.

The argument that the earth is round is a good specimen of scientific reasoning. Maundevile's premises are inaccurate, for there is no such star as the "Sterre Antartyk;" but his method is distinctly better than reasoning that the world must be round, because God

made it and the circle is the perfect figure. His identification of the center of the earth with Jerusalem is established by similarly questionable means, for it is not true that a spear placed erect will cast no shadow there at the time of the equinox; but there was more hope for science in such an argument than in the usual contention that it must be so, for the prophet Ezekiel said so.

**44. Ballads.** — At the present time we depend for our literature almost wholly upon books and papers, yet even now there are some popular songs well known to thousands of people, which it would be hard to find in print. A few centuries ago literature of this sort was very common, and not a few of the ballads that passed from mouth to mouth in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries have survived by oral tradition even to our own time. The term "ballad" is often loosely used for almost any kind of song, but more strictly it is applied to these traditional songs of the people. We do not know who composed them, nor (in most cases) how old they are. They are generally narrative poems, and they tell stories which were doubtless popularly known before the ballads took shape; but just how these stories crept from mere tradition into verse, we cannot tell. It is generally agreed that the fifteenth century was especially productive of ballads, and for that reason they are considered in this chapter; but it must be remembered that they were not then a new thing, and that they did not then die out. Many of them have close parallels in other Indo-European languages, which seem to suggest for their substance, and sometimes

even for their form, a very great antiquity; while others, seemingly of the same general character, are founded upon actual events known to have occurred as late as the eighteenth century.

The favorite form of the true popular ballad is the so-called "ballad stanza":

In somer, when the shawes[1] be sheyne,[2]
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre foréste
To here the foulys song;

To se the dere draw to the dale,
And leve the hillès hee,
And shadow hem in the levès grene,
Under the grene-wode tre.

Many of the ballads are cheap and vulgar, while many (like the verses just quoted) have an exquisite beauty which few of our more lettered poets can rival; but absolute simplicity is characteristic of them all. They tell of the sort of incidents and emotions that appeal to the popular heart, and they speak the popular language. Stories of crime, of love, of enchantment are common; and the heroes are knights, or squires, or minstrels, or (better still) outlaws who live "under the grene-wode tre." All, however, are seen from the people's point of view. If a ballad tells the tragedy of a noble lady's life, it puts the essential pathos poignantly, for there is no monopoly in suffering; but it generally has some minor touches which show that the unessentials of aristocratic life are viewed from far away. The fol-

[1] groves. [2] beautiful.

lowing stanzas, for example, form the conclusion of the Ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens*. Sir Patrick had been sent to sea on a mad voyage in midwinter, and he and all the Scots nobles with him were lost. It will be seen that the grief of the mourners is genuinely felt, but that the world they live in is to the unknown poet like a far-away world of popular romance.

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
  Wi thair fans into their hand,
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spens
  Cum sailing to the land.

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
  Wi thair gold kems in their hair,
Waiting for thair ain deir lords,
  For they 'll se thame na mair.

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,
  It 's fiftie fadom deip,
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spens,
  Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

Robin Hood, the mythical hero of popular legend, is the central figure in some of the best ballads, and about him are clustered a number of satellites, such as Little John, Maid Marian, Will Scarlett, and Friar Tuck, just as Launcelot, Gawayne, and Guinevere grouped themselves about the hero of the great cycle of court romance. Indeed, some of the ballads are mere popularized abridgments of the old romances ; but these are generally far inferior to those of wholly popular origin. The latter, too, are noteworthy in literary history as

ost the only part of our mediæval literature that d nothing to French influence.

'he following ballad, known as *Edward*, is one of best that are short enough to be given here come. The text is of uncertain age, but the substance ;t be very old, for it is found among the popular ads of Sweden and Denmark.

Quhy dois ȝour brand sae drop wi' bluid,
Edward, Edward?
Quhy dois ȝour brand sae drop wi' bluid,
And quhy sae sad gang ȝee, O?
O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
Mither, mither:
O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
And I had nae mair bot hee, O!

ȝour haukis bluid was nevir sae reid,
Edward, Edward:
ȝour haukis bluid was nevir sae reid,
My deir son I tell thee, O!
O I hae killed my reid-roan steid,
Mither, mither:
O I hae killed my reid-roan steid,
That erst was sae fair and free, O!

ȝour steid was auld, and ȝe hae gat mair,
Edward, Edward:
ȝour steid was auld, and ȝe hae gat mair,
Sum other dule [1] ȝe drie,[2] O!
O I hae killed my fadir deir,
Mither, mither:
O I hae killed my fadir deir,
Alas, and wae is mee, O!

[1] sorrow. [2] suffer.

And quhatten penance wul ȝe drie for that,
Edward, Edward?
And quhatten penance wul ȝe drie for that?
My deir son, now tell me, O.
Ile set my feit in ȝonder boat,
Mither, mither:
Ile set my feit in ȝonder boat,
And Ile fare ovir the sea, O.

And quhat wul ȝe doe wi' ȝour towirs and ȝour ha',
Edward, Edward?
And quhat wul ȝe doe wi' ȝour towirs and ȝour ha',
That were sae fair to see, O?
Ile let thame stand til they doun fa',
Mither, mither:
Ile let thame stand til they doun fa',
For here nevir mair maun I bee, O.

And quhat wul ȝe leive to ȝour bairns and ȝour wife,
Edward, Edward?
And quhat wul ȝe leive to ȝour bairns and ȝour wife,
Quhan ȝe gang ovir the sea, O?
The warldis room, let them beg throw life,
Mither, mither:
The warldis room, let them beg throw life,
For thame nevir mair wul I see, O.

And quhat wul ȝe leive to ȝour ain mither deir,
Edward, Edward?
And quhat wul ȝe leive to ȝour ain mither deir?
My deir son, now tell me, O.
The curse of hell frae me sall ȝe beir,
Mither, mither:
The curse of hell frae me sall ȝe beir,
Sic counsels ȝe gave to me, O.

It is remarkable that at the times when these ballads flourished they were not regarded as literature at all. They were sung or recited by harpists or fiddlers in village market-places, and were taught by grandmothers to their children's children as snatches of nursery rime are taught nowadays; but until comparatively modern times the literary classes seem to have paid them little attention. After the middle of the eighteenth century the educated world "discovered" them, and their simplicity, their tragic intensity, their extraordinary beauty, were among the chief influences in the great revolution in literary taste that then took place. Little space is accorded to them here, because during their centuries of subterranean existence they had no influence upon the general history of literature; but they are of the greatest importance to the student of eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetry, and are an endless delight to the general reader.

**45. Dramatic Entertainments.** — We have seen that the Wife of Bath was fond of going to "pleyes of myracles." Miracle Plays had been a common form of popular entertainment long before her time, and they continued in favor till they were superseded by the drama of Shakespeare's age. They had been originally mere dramatizations of Biblical stories, presented in church by the clergy for the instruction and edification of the unlettered laity; but in the thirteenth century the town guilds (organizations somewhat like the modern trades' unions) took them up and began giving them regularly in public places, just as a modern college fraternity or regiment of militia may give an operetta or a

play. There were no theatres, but none were needed for such simple representations as were then found satisfactory. The guilds performed on *pageants*, large movable stages not unlike our circus vans or mail wagons, with room inside to dress, and room on top for acting. At a time previously announced, one of these pageants, drawn (let us suppose) by some members of the guild of Tanners, would appear in the market-place of the town, or at some suitable street-corner, and stop there. When all was ready, those of the guild who were chosen to do the acting would appear on the top and perform a little play about the Creation; and when it was ended, the pageant would be drawn away, to give its play again in some other part of the town. Meanwhile, another pageant, provided by the guild of Tallow-chandlers, arrives and portrays the temptation and fall of man. After this comes a long series of plays, running perhaps through the whole period of Old Testament history; and the audience spend the whole of a holiday watching them.

Another kind of dramatic entertainment common in the later middle ages was the Morality Play. This was a dramatized moral allegory. The play of *Everyman*, for example, tells how God sends Death to Everyman to summon him to judgment. Everyman is reluctant, but finds that he cannot disobey the summons. He goes to a friend named Fellowship and tells him that he is in trouble, and Fellowship makes extravagant protestations of eagerness to do anything for him; but when he learns that Everyman wants him to go on a long journey at the bidding of Death, he backs out and leaves

Everyman alone in his despair. The hero of the play then consults Good Deeds, but she says he has neglected her so long that she can do nothing for him. In like manner every resource fails him, until he makes the acquaintance of Confession and does penance for his sins. After that Good Deeds promises to stay by him to the end, and he dies in peace.

The fifteenth century saw both Miracle and Morality Plays at the height of their popularity, but the former and probably also the latter had existed long before. It is sometimes supposed that the Moralities grew out of the Miracle Plays, but it is more likely that they grew up separately. Both were manifestations of a dramatic instinct which seems always to have existed in the English race. The *fabliaux* and the ballads and the romances could not be well sung or recited without a good deal of action and dramatic expression, and the two species of plays were simply two set forms in which the same dramatic instinct manifested itself.

The Moralities interest us chiefly as being the germ from which, in the sixteenth century, the regular drama developed; but they are interesting also as presenting mediæval allegory in one of its latest stages. We have seen how allegory sprang from the mystical habit of seeing deep meanings in natural phenomena. From this grew the literary fashion of personifying abstractions, as was done in *Piers Plowman*, for example, and in the chivalrous court allegory. In the later middle ages, however, allegory seems to have lost its first mysterious charm, and to have been used simply because it was the fashion. In *Piers Plowman* it is evident that the poet

was only half at ease — that he was always tempted to individualize his abstract characters. He gives, for example, an elaborate account of the Seven Deadly Sins; but "Gluttony" is not a mere personification; he is a very human glutton, evidently drawn from Langland's actual observation among the lower classes. "Covetousness" has a wife named Rose, who keeps a retail shop at Westminster, goes to the fair at Winchester, cheats with false cloth measures, etc.; and so through the list. The characters are Sins in name only; in fact, they are individual sinners. In the Moralities we find the same tendency toward concreteness. The earlier writers were content with such heroes as "Everyman" or "Humanity," while the minor characters were mere personifications of vices and virtues, or other abstract ideas; and the plots were strict allegories representing the conflict between virtue and temptation. Later plays, however, are limited less and less by the exact significance of the names of the characters, the *dramatis personae* become more and more like individuals, and the plots are constructed as much for entertainment as for moral instruction. The devil figured conspicuously, and while in the earliest plays he must have impressed the spectators with horror and fear, in later ones he was an extravagant burlesque, equipped with a long tail and intended almost solely to raise a laugh. Another stock character, known specifically as "The Vice," frequently consorted with him, and in the later plays is made equally ludicrous. Comic episodes abound, in which the characters (especially the vices) play absurd jokes upon one another, some of them

being much more like circus clowns than solemn allegorical abstractions. Indeed, the "clown" or "fool" of the later drama is a lineal descendant of the Vice of the Morality. This tendency to concreteness was a natural result of the dramatic form, for the stage is a place for individuals rather than for allegory; but it was also a symptom of the passing of mediæval mysticism, and presents a close parallel to the satirical touch given to chivalrous allegory in such poems as *The Court of Love*.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RENAISSANCE

**46. Caxton.** — The process of printing with movable types was invented on the continent just before the middle of the fifteenth century, and within the next two decades several printing offices were established there. At this time William Caxton, an English merchant, was engaged in business at Bruges. He was a lover of literature, and was quick to see both the literary and the commercial opportunities in the new art. Coming home to England in 1476, he brought with him printing presses and fonts of type, and opened the first English printing house in the neighborhood of Westminster Abbey. In 1477 he published the first book printed on English soil, entitled *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*. Other books followed in rapid succession, some new, others reissues of books long known in manuscript. Caxton's choice of books for printing was largely guided by his business instinct, but his literary tastes prompted him to print all the best books available in the language, and he translated many French books for the press with his own hand. Among the standard works that he printed were the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Confessio Amantis*, *Reynard the Fox*, and translations of some of Cicero's moral essays. The most celebrated of the new books from his press was Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

The invention of printing made the Renaissance possible. The immediate result was a great reduction in the price of books, and a correspondingly great increase in the supply. A few figures will show the importance of the change. The following items are from the bill of a professional copyist, for work done in 1468 at his employer's order:

| | *s.* | *d.* |
|---|---|---|
| Itm for De Regimine Principum, which conteyneth xlv leves, after a peny a leef, which is right wele worth, . . . . . | iii | ix |
| Itm for Rubrissheyng of all the booke, . . | iii | iv |

The price, it seems, was a penny a leaf for the mere copying of an ordinary page of verse, and nearly as much more for simple decoration of margins, initial letters, etc., in red ink. For copying solid prose a double price was charged, so that a volume of moderate size, with the ordinary embellishments, would cost from threepence to fourpence a leaf. The price seems small enough, but all prices were low in the fifteenth century. An ox could be bought for twenty shillings, a sheep for two, and a pound of butter for a penny; and the wages of a skilled workman were only about sixpence a day. In general, money went ten or twelve times as far as it will go now, but it was more than ten or twelve times as hard to get. Fourpence a leaf then was, therefore, about equivalent to a dollar a leaf now. A simple calculation will show that to the average man of that time a book was as expensive as a horse is to-day, and a little library of three or four shelves was an almost impossible luxury.

We do not know the prices at which Caxton sold his works, but we have a record of two appraisals, shortly after his death, of one of his largest and most elegant folios — the *Golden Legend.* This was a book of 449 leaves, and the higher of the two values known to have been put upon it was 13*s.* 4*d.* Comparing this with the figures given above, even without allowing for the difference in size between Caxton's folio and the paper used by the earlier copyist, we get the inference that the immediate effect of the new art was to reduce the cost of books to about one-tenth what it had been. We have not sufficient data for exact comparisons, but it is certain that the reduction was very great, and these figures are sufficiently accurate for illustration.

**47. Skelton.** — The end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century were a period of transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The mediæval ideals had been shattered, but nothing was yet ready to take their place. The church had lost hold, but the Reformation had not yet begun. The monasteries in general had ceased to be seats of learning and centers of spiritual influence. The last vestige of chivalry had been effaced by the Wars of the Roses, which had devastated England through a great part of the fifteenth century; for whole families of noble blood had been annihilated, and gunpowder and ball had conclusively proved their superiority to knightly accoutrements. Peace had come in 1485, with the accession of Henry VII, but it had brought no revival of ancient chivalrous glory, no great awakening in the church, no renaissance in literature. Henry's reign

was a period of materialistic commercialism, in which (to characterize it sweepingly) England was destitute of spiritual life, ideals, or enthusiasm. But the forces were already at work which were destined to bring in the Renaissance.

The poet John Skelton was typical of this period. He might well have described himself in Matthew Arnold's phrase as

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,

for he saw that the mediæval world was dead, and the beginnings of modern civilization seemed to him impotent and aimless. He had had a thorough university education, and had taken priest's orders just before the turn of the century, — not because he felt any spiritual call to holy office, but because that was the natural thing for a young man of letters to do. The clergy had no monopoly of learning, but they had, among poor men, a monopoly of leisure. Ecclesiastical laws forbade priests to marry, but Skelton was both husband and father, for he looked upon ecclesiastical authorities with defiance and contempt. Much of his best verse was fierce satire upon the abuses in the church of which he was himself a minister. Here is a specimen from *Colyn Cloute*, written in the peculiar jerky metre still called "Skeltonic."

> And if ye stande in doute
> Who brought this ryme aboute,
> My name is Colyn Cloute.
> I purpose to shake oute

All my connyng bagge,
Lyke a clerkely hagge;
For though my ryme be ragged,
Tattered and iagged,
Rudely rayne beaten,
Rusty and moughte[1] eaten,
If ye take well therwith,
It hath in it some pyth.
For, as farre as I can se,
It is wronge with eche degre:
For the temporalte[2]
Accuseth the spiritualte;[3]
The spirituall agayne
Dothe grudge and complayne
Vpon the temporall men:
Thus eche of other blother[4]
The tone[5] agayng the tother:
Alas, they make me shoder!
For in hoder moder[6]
The Churche is put in faute;
The prelates ben so haut,[7]
They say, and loke so hy,
As though they wolde fly
Aboute the sterry skye.
Laye men say indede
How they take no hede
Theyr sely shepe to fede,
But plucke away and pull
The fleces of theyr wull,
Vnethes[8] they leue a locke
Of wull amonges theyr flocke;
And as for theyr connynge,[9]

[1] moth. [2] laity. [3] clergy. [4] gabble. [5] the tone = that on
[6] hugger-mugger, confusion. [7] haughty. [8] scarcely. [9] learnin
professional ability.

A glommynge and a mummynge,
And make therof a iape;[1]
They gaspe and they gape
All to have promocyon,
There is theyr hole deuocyon,
With money, if it wyll hap,
To catche the forked cap:[2]
Forsothe they are to lewd
To say so, all beshrewd!

last two lines are an ironical imprecation upon the ɔrant laymen who utter these irreverent slanders nst the clergy.

kelton wrote many kinds of poetry, from love-songs ne of which have a genuine lyrical beauty) to moral-plays (one of which is perhaps the best extant); he was interested in observing and criticising all ɪrtments of contemporary life. He dissects the rtier, the priest, and the tavern-keeper, with equal ɪness. The mediæval thinker, as we have seen, absorbed in the mysteries of life and death, but lton was concerned with the phenomena of life. work is often absolutely unquotable because of its ·seness, — such coarseness as is heard among the ɾant boys of city streets; but it has the merit of lness and vigor, and is not immoral. In *The Tun-g of Elynour Rummyng* he gives one of the most ɪ pictures in the English language of low debauch-describing all the forlorn women who frequent nour's ale-house on brewing days. The following mild specimen of his descriptive power:

[1] jest. [2] *i.e.*, the bishop's mitre.

But to make vp my tale,
She breweth noppy ale
And maketh therof port [1] sale
To trauellars, to tynkers,
To sweters, to swynkers,
And all good ale drynkers,
That wyll nothynge spare,
But drynke tyll they stare
And brynge themselfe bare,
With, Now away the mare,
And let us sley care,
As wise as an hare!

(The last three lines seem to represent the topers singing some drinking-song.)

Come who so will
To Elynour on the hyll,
Wyth, Fyll the cup, fyll,
And syt there by styll,
Erly and late:
Thyther cometh Kate,
Cysly, and Sare,
With theyr legges bare,
And also theyr fete
Hardeley [2] full unswete;
With theyr heles dagged,[3]
Theyr kyrtelles all to-iagged,
Theyr smockes all to-ragged,
Wyth tytters and tatters,
Brynge dysshes and platters,
Wyth all theyr myght runnynge
To Elynour Rummynge,
To haue of her tunnynge:
She leneth [4] them on [5] the same,

[1] wholesale. [2] assuredly. [3] be-mired. [4] furnisheth. [5] some of.

And thus begynneth the game.
Some wenches come vnlased,
Some huswyues come vnbrased,
A sorte of foule drabbes
All scuruy with scabbes:
Some be flybytten,
Some skewed [1] as a kytten;
Some wyth a sho clout
Bynde theyr heddes about;
Some haue no herelace,[2]
Theyr lockes about theyr face,
Theyr tresses vntrust,[3]
All full of vnlust;[4]
Some loke strawry,[5]
Some cawry mawry;[6]
Full vntydy tegges[7]
Lyke rotten egges.
Suche a lewde sorte
To Elynour resorte
From tyde to tyde:
Abyde, abyde,
And to you shall be tolde
Howe hyr ale is solde.

There is much buffoonery in Skelton, but no humor of the kindlier sort. There are passages that may be called fun, but they are the fun of a man who sees little in the world to love, and little hope for the future; they are the "*saeva indignatio*" of the pessimist who laughs fiercely in despair.

**48. Mediæval Universities.** — Until the period which we are now considering, the course of study at the great

[1] walking obliquely (?). [2] hair-band. [3] untrussed. [4] unloveliness. [5] seedy (?). [6] threadbare. [7] slatterns.

universities had for several centuries undergone no very radical change. The curriculum began with Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic (collectively designated as the *trivium*), and continued, for advanced students, with Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy (the *quadrivium*). The Grammar and Rhetoric of the *trivium* meant chiefly the parsing of Latin sentences, the composition of Latin verses, and the study of treatises by post-classical Latin grammarians and rhetoricians. Logic was in mediæval estimation the most important of the three subjects, for logic was the soul of philosophy, and philosophy was the end of all learning. Logical methods were used in all the more advanced studies. The student, for example, who had finished both *trivium* and *quadrivium*, and remained at the university for the study of theology, would pursue that study in some such manner as the following: he would attend lectures at which perhaps the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas would be read aloud (the students, of course, being unable to possess copies). Before reading, the lecturer stated the main divisions of the work, then the subdivisions of the first part, and the further subdivisions of the first subdivision, until he had reached the first sentence: then, if that sentence were not susceptible of still further subdivision, he would read it, paraphrase it, explain why it stood first, and what lessons were deducible from it. Then he would pass to the next, explaining why it stood second rather than first or third, and so on through the lesson.

This was the analytical method. The "dialectical" method of instruction was common also. A passage of

doubtful interpretation was read, and one interpretation was stated; then the students were set to work assailing or defending it. Finally the Master stated his own interpretation, and justified it.

It is not to be supposed that this sort of instruction was fruitless. It gave the young "clerk" an excellent training for a certain kind of intellectual cleverness. It did not, however, conduce to the general advancement of learning. The student of theology was encouraged to consider, not what was the relation of man to God, but what Thomas Aquinas or some other divine had said about it, and what he meant. The dialectical method made men very clever at disputing such questions as whether two angels could occupy the same place at the same time, or whether God could have assumed any other than the human form, and if so, whether, in case he had assumed the form of an animal or a vegetable, he could have had the power of speech; but such disputations did nothing for the cause of religion or science, and very little for the cause of liberal culture.

The life of the students was very hard. Most of them were poor. As late as 1550 we read that the students at St. John's College, Cambridge, had two meals a day on one pennyworth of meat, studied till nine or ten o'clock, and then ran or walked briskly for half an hour to warm their feet before going to bed. Diseases were common. In the reign of Henry VII the plague visited Oxford six times, and various other kinds of fever were the natural result of unsanitary conditions. Erasmus left the University of Paris in disgust, and said afterwards that he had brought away

little learning, but "a large quantity of lice"; and the English universities were probably not much more cleanly. All these things were due partly to ignorance, but partly also to the characteristic mediæval idea that the mind is improved by the sufferings of the flesh.

**49. The Revival of Learning.** — The Renaissance began in Italy in the latter part of the fifteenth century, and spread gradually to northern Europe. When we say this, we mean by the word Renaissance the transition between the mediæval world and the modern. We have seen that Chaucer was in most essentials a modern poet; and before his time Petrarch and Boccaccio had introduced much of the modern spirit into Italian letters; but the general awakening came a century later. It was a universal movement, affecting literature, religion, art, manners, science, — in short, all departments of human activity. We cannot account for it, except in part, just as we cannot altogether account for the greater renascence of the nineteenth century; we can only chronicle the events and connect them with one another.

Perhaps the most important feature of the Renaissance was the revival of interest in classical literature. It is usual to date this from the year 1453, for in that year Constantinople was taken by the Turks, and many Greek scholars who had lived there were driven to seek other homes. They carried their learning with them, and spread it over western Europe; but it would be safer to regard this event as merely contributing to the movement, — certainly not as its sole and sufficient explanation. The importance of the revelation of ancient literature to the mediæval world can hardly be over-

estimated. We are likely to underestimate it now, for, in the four centuries that have elapsed since the Renaissance, most of the virtue that was in Greek thought has been directly or indirectly absorbed into our own literature. If all the classical literature should somehow be taken away from us, the loss would be incomparably less than was the gain of finding it, to the mediæval world. Ancient Greece was to the Europe of the fifteenth century what modern Europe is to Japan. A race that had for many generations known nothing broader than the theology of the schools, the ascetic morality of the cloister, and science like that of Maundevile and the *Bestiary*, was suddenly brought face to face with the highest civilization that the world had yet known, and the result was an incalculable widening of their mental, moral, and spiritual horizon. The new spirit thus introduced is sometimes called "humanism," and we speak of the men who were foremost in introducing it as "the humanists."

**50. The Humanists.**—The most eminent of the humanists was Desiderius Erasmus. He was born at Rotterdam about 1466, and was bred in Holland; yet in writing to a compatriot he once apologized for writing in Latin, on the ground that he was not sufficiently acquainted with Dutch. This fact illustrates his cosmopolitan character. He was "a citizen of Europe," and Latin, which was the language of learning at Oxford as well as at Paris or Rome, was his only natural medium. He was persuaded, when hardly past boyhood, to become a monk; but he bitterly regretted the step, and after a few years obtained permission to leave his

monastery. For several years he wandered from place to place in northern Europe, eagerly seeking to perfect his education, and especially seeking some one who could teach him Greek; for he heard of the new learning, and he knew that Greek was the key to it. At length, probably in 1498, he came to Oxford. There he found a little circle of learned and large-minded men, some of whom had been in Italy and learned Greek, while all were enthusiastic for the new culture. He was charmed with them, and they with him. His restless nature prevented him from settling permanently in England, although he was repeatedly urged to do so, and the greater part of his life was passed on the continent; but he made other visits to England in later years, and the English Renaissance perhaps owed as much to him as to any individual Englishman.

The best known of the works of Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, was written in England. In its original form it was, of course, in Latin, and it is not strictly a part of English literature at all; but it was often republished in English, and it reveals the spirit of the new learning more clearly than any other single work of the time. It was written hurriedly, more in fun than in earnest, and is a satire upon the various kinds of folly which were left over from the mediæval world; but though it is for the most part humorous, and negative rather than positive in its criticism, it contains many serious passages of real eloquence, and affords hints of the higher ideals of the reformers, as well as of the older ideals which it was their purpose to shatter. The following passages are from one of the standard translations:

The divines present themselves next. . . . They are exquisitely dexterous in unfolding the most intricate mysteries; they will tell you to a tittle all the successive proceedings of omnipotence in the creation of the universe; they will explain the precise manner of original sin being derived from our first parents; they will satisfy you in what manner, by what degrees, and in how long a time, our Saviour was conceived in the Virgin's womb, and demonstrate in the consecrated wafer how accidents may subsist without a subject. . . . And these subtilties are alchymized to a more refined sublimate by the abstracting brains of their school-men; the realists, the nominalists, the thomists, the albertists, the occamists, the scotists; these are not all, but the rehearsal of a few only, as a specimen of their divided sects; in each of which there is so much of deep learning, so much of unfathomable difficulty, that I believe the apostles themselves would stand in need of a new illuminating spirit, if they were to engage in any controversy with these new divines. . . .

The next to these are another sort of brain-sick fools, who style themselves monks and of religious orders, though they assume both titles very unjustly. . . . Most of them place their greatest stress for salvation on a strict conformity to their foppish ceremonies, and a belief of their legendary traditions; wherein they fancy to have acquitted themselves with so much of supererogation, that one heaven can never be a condign reward for their meritorious life; little thinking that the Judge of all the earth at the last day shall put them off, with a who hath required these things at your hands; and call them to account only for the stewardship of his legacy, which was the precept of love and charity. It will be pretty to hear their pleas before the great tribunal: one will brag how he mortified his carnal appetite by feeding only upon fish: another will urge that he spent most of his time on earth in the divine exercise of singing psalms: a third will tell how many days

he fasted, and what severe penance he imposed on himself for the bringing his body into subjection: another shall produce in his own behalf as many ceremonies as would load a fleet of merchant-men; a fifth shall plead, that in threescore years he never so much as touched a piece of money, except he fingered it through a thick pair of gloves: a sixth, to testify his former humility, shall bring along with him his sacred hood, so old and nasty, that any seaman had rather stand bare-headed on the deck, than put it on to defend his head from the sharpest storms: the next that comes to answer for himself shall plead, that for fifty years together he had lived like a sponge upon the same place, and was content never to change his homely habitation: another shall whisper softly, and tell the judge he has lost his voice by a continual singing of holy hymns and anthems: the next shall confess how he fell into a lethargy by a strict, reserved, and sedentary life: and the last shall intimate that he has forgot to speak, by having always kept silence, in obedience to the injunction of taking heed lest he should have offended with his tongue. But amidst all their fine excuses our Saviour shall interrupt them with this answer, Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, verily I know you not; I left you but one precept, of loving one another, which I do not hear any one plead he has faithfully discharged: I told you plainly in my gospel, without any parable, that my father's kingdom was prepared, not for such as should lay claim to it by austerities, prayers, or fastings, but for those who should render themselves worthy of it by the exercise of faith, and the offices of charity: I cannot own such as depend on their own merits without a reliance on my mercy: as many of you therefore as trust to the broken reeds of your own deserts, may even go search out a new heaven, for you shall never enter into that, which from the foundations of the world was prepared only for such as are true of heart.

A younger member of Erasmus's English circle was Sir Thomas More. His best known work, the *Utopia*, belongs to English literature only in the same indirect way as *The Praise of Folly*. It is a fanciful sketch of an ideal commonwealth, governed according to the enlightened principles of the humanists. The book is made up partly of serious speculations, partly of grave irony, and partly of purely playful fancies. When we read that in Utopia there is no persecution for religious differences, and no capital punishment for minor felonies, we feel that More is considering the reconstruction of society in a really scientific spirit; but when we are told that the Utopians use gold and precious stones only for chains and badges of servitude, it is clear that he is merely playing with his subject. As a whole, however, the *Utopia* is properly regarded as a typical product of the humanistic movement. It has sometimes been contrasted with *Piers Plowman*, and a comparison of the two books is suggestive. Each book is a protest against the mediæval organization of society, and each author was eagerly desirous of social reform; but all that Langland could do was to cry out against evil, and passionately exhort the world to righteousness and industry. Really to devise a regenerated society, based upon enlightened legislation and economic theory, was a task that had to wait for a mind widened by the Renaissance and the Revival of Learning.

The *Utopia* and *The Praise of Folly* illustrate the secular and the religious sides, respectively, of humanism; but Erasmus was not exclusively a theologian, and More, when there came a breach between church and

state, laid down his life for the church. The two books must be considered together, as jointly illustrative of the kind of thinking that the humanists stood for. They spread the new culture by miscellaneous writings, but perhaps still more by their immediate personal influence. There was a great controversy, for example, over the introduction of Greek studies in the universities. The circle of Erasmus and More advocated it, for Greek was the key to the gospels as opposed to the scholastic theology, and to the wider culture of Athens as opposed to that of the middle ages. There was much bitter opposition, for the humanists were regarded as heretics, and Greek learning was evidently dangerous to orthodoxy; but the reformers attained some signal successes in a very short time. In 1517, for example, the new Corpus Christi college was founded at Oxford, with a charter expressly providing for the study of Greek. To Erasmus it seemed that the campaign was won, and the end of mediævalism already in sight.

**51. The Reformation.** — The humanistic movement would doubtless have won the day sooner, if it had not been overshadowed by the Reformation. At the time when Erasmus and his friends were working for the peaceful extension of classical culture, and were hoping thereby to accomplish a sweeping reform in church and state, Martin Luther was beginning on the continent that violent revolt against the Church of Rome which in the end left nearly all of northern Europe Protestant. Erasmus was a loyal Catholic. He argued persistently against the abuses of Romanism, and against the narrow theology of the Romanists; but what he wanted was

reform within the church, not secession from it. Luther, on the other hand, was as illiberal in his theology as the church from which he revolted. In true mediæval fashion he based his doctrines about original sin, justification by faith, predestination, etc., largely upon the authority of the early fathers of the church; and the essence of his Protestant theology was in most respects difference of opinion with the Church of Rome, rather than difference of spirit or method. It was not his theological thinking that made him great, but his persistent and dauntless courage; and his popular strength came from his eloquent denunciation of Romanist corruption, as much as from his substitute for the Catholic faith.

Erasmus at first sympathized with Luther. When asked his opinion of him, he said, "Luther has committed two crimes: he has hit the Pope on his crown, and the monks in their bellies." But in general he would rather expound the gospels than quarrel about them, and he once wrote to Luther that a courteous reserve would accomplish more than impetuosity. As the Reformation gathered force, he looked upon it with increasing uneasiness. It was wiping out abuses which he abhorred, but it also threatened to thwart his highest intellectual hopes. It aroused angry passions, and was accompanied by violent political upheavals, instead of reasonable discussion. It is true that the work of the Oxford humanists had done much to prepare the way for the Reformation; as was said at the time, Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it; but Erasmus protested that his egg had a genuine chicken in it, and Luther had hatched out a very different bird.

The English Reformation was precipitated by a personal quarrel of the king. Henry VIII wanted to divorce his queen, in order to marry the beautiful Anne Boleyn, and the Pope would not consent to the divorce; accordingly Henry put an end to papal supremacy, and constituted himself the supreme head of the Church of England. This act was possible only because of the strong spirit of popular opposition to the Church of Rome, fostered by the work of Luther as well as by that of the humanists; but it was primarily a personal and political revolt, and only secondarily a religious one. It led to much persecution and bloodshed, Sir Thomas More being one of the first to lose his head in the cause of the old church; and for a time, in the turbulence that followed, it seemed that the era of culture inaugurated by the Oxford reformers had passed away. In fact, after the Reformation was finished, the university movement went on, and in so far as it was merely a movement toward higher culture and the revival of classical literature, it eventually triumphed; but the movement for more liberal theology was effectually strangled in its infancy.

**52. Wyatt and Surrey.** — Humanism was the chief element in the Renaissance, but it was not all. There was nothing æsthetic in the Revival of Learning. Erasmus was in Italy in the age of Michelangelo and Raphael, but the things that interested him there were the new learning and the new theology; and while he was crossing the Alps on mule-back he whiled away the time by composing some Latin verses on old age. In Utopia the population was not made up of painters, poets, or musicians;

the people were intensely practical, and got along very well without art. But as we look back upon the Renaissance, it seems to us that the new impulse given by it to the artistic expression of feeling was almost as extraordinary as the widening of the intellectual horizon. The two poets whose names head this section were typical figures in the artistic part of the movement.

Under the influence of the Revival of Learning, it had become common for the sons of English gentlemen to seek a higher education than their ancestors had thought worth while. Erasmus tells us that this began to be fashionable about the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thenceforth the sons of noblemen were more commonly seen at the universities, and as Italy was the land of culture, it became fashionable for them to make a pilgrimage thither. But the gay youths naturally went to Italy not, as Erasmus did, because it was the land of Greek learning, but because they wanted to see the world. To them Italy was the land of literature and art; and a literary and artistic enthusiasm was what they brought with them on their return home. In Italy, at this time, there was a fashionable revival of interest in poetry, and especially in a certain kind of love poetry; and the consequence was that in England the composition of love poetry after the Italian pattern became a favorite accomplishment for fashionable men.

Wyatt and Surrey were courtiers of Henry VIII, and gentlemen in public life; they were only secondarily poets. But they were gentlemen of brilliant accomplishments, educated both at home and abroad, and of course they wrote verse of the fashionable kind. This kind

was, in spirit, akin to the French romances of the school of Chrestien of Troyes. As it was the work of gentlemen, instead of professional poets, it naturally took the form of songs, lyrics, *vers de société*, instead of long narratives of chivalrous adventure; but it presents an artificial conception of love not unlike what we saw in the romances of the twelfth century. Wyatt and Surrey, as well as divers other poets of the period, seem to have amused themselves and their friends by pouring out impassioned addresses to ladies whom they did not love, complaining of rebuffs which they had not suffered, or praying for favors which they did not want. Poetry of this sort was in itself unpromising. The only school of poetry that can produce great results is that in which poets learn to express with sincerity feelings that are really near to their hearts. The importance of the school of Wyatt and Surrey, however, was great in an indirect way; for it directed the attention of men of brilliant powers to poetry, strengthened the hold of literature upon fashionable society, and started an era of experimental versifying which was destined in the end to culminate in the work of the great Elizabethan poets.

We are ignorant of the dates of composition of many of the poems of Wyatt and Surrey, and therefore cannot with certainty decide which was first in some of the innovations introduced by them; but between them they are entitled to the credit of being the first English writers of sonnets. The sonnet form is one of many highly artificial forms of verse imported from abroad, and it is the only one that has proved eminently success-

ful in the hands of English poets. Wyatt and Surrey borrowed it from the poets of Italy, and achieved a very indifferent success with it; but within half a century many other English poets were bettering their instruction. Surrey alone is entitled to a doubtful credit for being the first English poet to write blank verse. That form of composition has indeed proved the noblest of which English verse is susceptible; but Surrey's blank verse was bad, and he evidently wrote it not because he had any sense of the possibilities latent in the form, but because some Italian poets had used it. It was reserved for Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Milton to discover its real glories.

The work of Wyatt and Surrey was not altogether in the artificial love poetry of the court. Wyatt passed the last years of his life in retirement, and during that period composed some poems of a much more genuine sort, containing some sincere and dignified reflections upon his former life at court, and the life that he was then leading in the country. Surrey, too, left some poetry of much nobler pretensions than the idle verse of gallantry. But, as it happened, the genius of each was essentially lyrical, and both did their best work in the more artificial kind of verse. Many of the poems of each may fairly be called detestable, but both poets occasionally rose to a real poetic height. Comparative estimates of the two are often attempted, but seem futile. Wyatt, perhaps, shows a truer poetic genius; but then Surrey died very young. Surrey has more polish and fluency, but then he had the work of his older contemporary for a model. The following

specimen of Wyatt's work has genuine merits, both in feeling and in style:

Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet when first began
The weary life ye know, since whan,
The suit, the service none tell can;
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet the great assays,
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways,
The painful patience in delays,
Forget not yet!

Forget not, O, forget not this,
How long ago hath been, and is
The mind that never meant amiss —
Forget not yet!

Forget not then thine own approved
The which so long hath thee so loved,
Whose steadfast faith yet never moved —
Forget not this!

**53. Conclusion.** — The full development of the Renaissance in England was delayed by the political excitements and uncertainties of the reigns of Henry, Edward, and Mary; but the seed had been sown, and the fruits were harvested in the reign of Elizabeth. The history of the Elizabethan literature is without the scope of this volume, and we will only consider briefly some of the ways in which the Renaissance led up to it.

The most brilliant achievement of the Elizabethan age was the development of the drama. We have already seen its crude beginnings in the Miracle and Morality Plays. If there had been no Revival of Learning, we can imagine that some sort of drama might have been evolved. Native English instincts might well have completed the substitution of individuals for abstractions in the Moralities; but at best we should have had only a wild, unregulated melodrama, without unity or form. As it was, the scholarly men at the schools and universities became interested in the classical drama. In the third quarter of the sixteenth century they were acting Latin plays before select audiences, and writing English plays in imitation of them. These plays were hardly fit for acting. *Gorboduc*, for example, which is commonly distinguished as the first English tragedy, presents not actions but long speeches about actions — moral essays in the form of dialogue, with deeds for their texts. Such plays as this were purely academic products, and could never have led to a national drama. They were useful, however, in modifying the existing popular drama. They suggested to such men as Christopher Marlowe the idea that the drama was a suitable medium of expression for a great poet. They showed how it might be used to portray the highest passions in an elevated style and an artistic form. At the same time, writers of Moralities had already learned that the stage is the place for doing things, not merely saying them; and they had discovered the great advantage of mixing comic elements with tragic. The Elizabethan drama descended from the old Morality Plays, under the modifying influence of the

classical drama. It was a combination of the elements demanded by scholarly critics and the elements demanded by popular audiences.

The æsthetic movement which was begun in the time of Wyatt and Surrey continued throughout the Elizabethan period. It was the fashion to be able to write poetry, and especially love lyrics; and among the many who were moved to write, a surprising number exhibited real genius. Many anthologies of verse were published, known now, collectively, as the Elizabethan Miscellanies. The titles of some of them, such as the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, or the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, illustrate a certain artificial quality from which little of the Elizabethan lyrical poetry is absolutely free. The following specimen, a song of Lyly's, has this quality, but it also has the daintiness and delicacy that made so many of the love-songs of the period imperishable.

Cupid and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses; Cupid paid:
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple on his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win:
At last he set her both his eyes —
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?

In prose as well as in poetry the Elizabethans developed a style of their own, often disfigured by artificial attempts at elegance, but nevertheless very helpful to literary progress. Lyly was one of the worst offenders against simplicity, and his romance, *Euphues*, has given us the word euphuism for the peculiar affectations of its style. Lyly delighted in sentences like this: "O divine nature, O heavenly nobilitie, what thing can there more be required in a Prince than in greatest power to shew greatest patience, in chiefest glorye to bring forth chiefest grace, in abundance of all earthly pomp to manifest abundance of all heavenly piety: O fortunate England that hath such a Queen, ungrateful, if thou pray not for her, wicked, if thou do not love her, miserable, if thou lose her." This style was, of course, vicious; but it was the result of conscious study of style, and it was only after many writers had studied and experimented with prose, that a good English style could at last become common.

A noteworthy example of the influence of humanism upon the inner life and spirit of England is seen in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Spenser, indeed, may be chosen to represent almost any of the great movements in contemporary thought; but we will close with a suggestion as to the great significance of his attitude towards moral problems. His great poem is composed throughout in a moral spirit; but it is the moral spirit of the classical heathen philosophers, not that of the middle ages. To Spenser, virtue is not primarily that quality which will bring us to heaven, but that which is intrinsically beautiful. Sin is not (as

in the mediæval homilies or Miracle Plays) the thing that leads to hell-mouth, but the thing that is intrinsically detestable. This idea of morality is made the basis of a long romantic allegory, in which the virtues are personified as gallant knights and beautiful ladies, while the vices are witches, ogres, and dragons. This is perhaps the crowning example in Elizabethan literature of the triumph of classical over mediæval feeling; and it shows how the æsthetic Renaissance and the Revival of Learning were at last blended. It also illustrates the close relation of literature to life. The spirit of Spenser's poem is different from that of the *Pricke of Conscience*, because the Renaissance had wrought a complete change in men's everyday modes of thought.

CENTRAL RESERVE

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